Northern Ireland
Assembly

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)

and

JOURNAL OF PROCEEDINGS

Volume 70
(16 December 2011 to 29 January 2012)

BELFAST: THE STATIONERY OFFICE LTD
£70.00

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ISBN 978-0-339-80068-7

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Assembly Sittings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 16 January 2012

The Assembly met at 12.00 noon (Mr Speaker in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Point of Order

Mr Campbell: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. On a number of occasions, I understand, issues have been raised with you regarding the use of language in the Chamber. On this occasion, I ask you to review the use of language in statements by Ministers. The protocol has been well enough established by the Assembly regarding the use of a language other than English: if another language is used, whether it be Irish, German, Spanish, Portuguese or the language of any other bankrupt nation, what is said should be translated into English. However, the statement by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development that will be heard shortly and is already in tabulated form for Members, uses Irish at its start and end but with no English translation provided.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member is quite right to say that Members have raised the matter with me on a number of occasions. I have continually said to all Members, especially to those who have raised the issue with me, and I say again now to Mr Campbell that, irrespective of the language that Members choose to use, even in ministerial statements, it is important that they then translate into English. I have continually said that, because it is important that it be done. I am not saying that Members should not speak in whatever language they want; it is understandable for them to do that. However, please understand, whether it be ministerial statements or any Member speaking in the House, Members should, as far as possible, then translate into English. That has always been very clear to me as Speaker and, hopefully, to the whole House as well.

Mr McCarthy: Further to that point of order, this is our first day here in the new year, and I am absolutely disgusted to hear that that is all that Gregory Campbell, a man of long experience, has to worry about: which language we speak. That is a disgrace —

Mr Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order. Members know that this is a sensitive issue. *[Interruption.]* Order. It is a sensitive issue, and I allow Members to raise issues that are sensitive to them and to the House. I think that it is very simple: Members should just translate whatever they say in another language into English. That would be simpler for everybody. Let us move on, please.

Ministerial Statements

EU Fisheries Council: 15-16 December 2011

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Tá fáilte romhaibh. Thank you, Mr Speaker. I welcome Members to the House as I deliver a statement on the outcome of the negotiations at the Fisheries Council held in Brussels on 15 and 16 December 2011, which determined fishing opportunities for 2012.

The topic that dominated negotiations was fishing effort or days at sea, an issue with which some Members will be familiar. There are controls on the number of days that our local fishing fleet can fish in the Irish Sea that stem from the cod recovery plan. The latest version of the cod recovery plan came into being in November 2008. We had serious reservations then about the plan and its mechanisms for controlling fishing effort. At that time, my colleague Conor Murphy, who represented Michelle Gildernew at the discussions, expressed those concerns because of the impact that that would have on the local prawn fleet. We opposed the approach then, and the circumstances that unfolded prior to Christmas reinforce our view that the plan was poorly conceived and designed.

The cod recovery plan provides for the automatic reduction in the total allowable catch (TAC) for cod and the reduction of days at sea for the fleets that are responsible for up to 80% of the total fishing mortality of cod. Those reductions will happen for as long as cod stocks are below the critical level, which has been set at 6,000 tons of spawning stock biomass in the plan. Scientists believe that the stock is currently below 2,000 tons, and there are no indications that cod stocks will recover beyond the critical level soon.

The cod plan allows member states to decide how the total number of days at sea is shared out among their vessels operating in the cod recovery zone, which includes the Irish Sea, the west coast of Scotland and the North Sea. There are limits set for each sea area, and the effort pots are based on the average fishing effort expended by member states' fleets in those areas during the period from 2004 to 2006. It is that fishing effort baseline that is eroded year on year by the automatic reductions mechanism included in the cod plan. As Members will appreciate, that would eventually result in our fishing fleet, which is now almost entirely focused on fishing for prawns and catching very little cod, not putting to sea if cod fails to recover.

The issue of days at sea arose from the interpretation of article 13 of the cod recovery plan, which allows member states to buy back days at sea if their fleets comply with measures to reduce cod mortality. Those can include technical measures, such as more selective fishing gears, or management measures to avoid fishing in areas where there are concentrations of juvenile cod or places where cod spawning happens. The problem came to light in October 2011 when the Commission wrote to several member states setting out its interpretation of article 13 of the cod plan and the level of buy-backs. It was the Commission's view that member states could buy back effort only to the level of their allowable effort for the previous year. The authorities here, in Britain and in other member states believed that the plan allowed effort buy-backs up to the level of the original baseline position.

Negotiations were still ongoing with the Commission in November 2011 when it unexpectedly made a regulation imposing fishing effort reductions on a number of member states for exceeding their limit for fishing effort in 2010 based on the Commission's interpretation of the cod plan. As a result of urgent intervention by Fisheries Ministers, the Commission agreed to withdraw the regulation in order to provide time to clarify the figures.

Minister Richard Benyon from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), Scottish Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead and I had a productive meeting with Commissioner Damanaki on 5 December. There was a shared commitment to find a solution to the problem of interpretation of the cod plan that was acceptable to the Commission and member states. That was a very difficult and detailed negotiation, with each side deploying legal arguments in support of its position. Official dialogue continued right up to Council level, but a deal remained in the balance. We were faced with a very serious situation — perhaps the most significant threat in recent years. If the Commission's interpretation of the cod plan had prevailed, the clawback and penalties imposed for the alleged effort overruns by our fishing fleet would have meant an end to fishing by those vessels in the Irish Sea until such times as the cod recovery plan was modified or replaced.

We want to see cod recover, but there is little point in addressing that if it leads to the decimation of the fishing fleet and the processing firms that depend on their landings or if it leads to economic hardship for the hard-pressed rural communities that depend on the sea for a livelihood. Some 110 vessels, 400 jobs in the catching sector and 560 full-time equivalent jobs in processing businesses were at risk, and countless others here who are involved in the support industry provide engineering services, fish-selling businesses and other support services.

There is no doubt that the cod plan is flawed and needs fundamental change. It was hoped that the Commission's review of the plan back in 2011 would bring that about. The preliminary evaluation in June 2011 concluded that the effort regime was an ineffective conservation measure and that the plan had failed to restore cod stocks in any area. However, the full review of the plan will not be complete until sometime this year, and, with the focus now on the reform of the common fisheries policy, I fear that a window of opportunity has been missed.

As I pointed out to Commissioner Damanaki, we want to see cod recover. However, as I said, there is little point in that happening if it leads to the decimation of our fishing industry and imposes hardship on rural communities.

Following more discussions at Council, a deal emerged under which the Commission was prepared to accept our interpretation of buy-backs of effort under article 13 of the cod plan. In return, we agreed that further effort would be made to reduce cod mortality by our fleets through the introduction of technical measures. However, the Commission could not accept our arguments for setting aside the mechanism to automatically reduce effort annually. The cod plan does not have a mechanism for avoiding effort reductions if the cod mortality does not fall, nor does it give any discretion to the Commission or the Council over what the reductions should be. Consequently, the effort pot for 2012 was reduced by 25%, as provided for in the cod plan. However, article 11 of the cod plan provides an opportunity for fleets to be exempt from all effort restrictions if they deploy fishing gears that reduce the cod catch to less than 1·5% of the total catch. The gears must be approved by the Commission's Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF), and member states must apply to the Commission to get groups of vessels exempted. Currently, there is only one gear, named the Swedish grid, that guarantees exemption. Following our meeting on 5 December, Commissioner Damanaki confirmed that vessels using the Swedish grid would be automatically exempt without the need for member states to apply to the Commission. She expressed the Commission's readiness to consider other gear solutions that are potentially more suitable for our fleets, and she gave a personal undertaking to ask STECF for a swift assessment of them.

I had discussions with our local industry on 13 December about the problems that we faced. At that time, it was uncertain whether we would be successful in the argument on the ceiling for effort buy-backs, and a fundamental change to the cod plan was unlikely. Ongoing discussions with the Commission suggested that there may be some prospect of compromise if more could be done to reduce cod mortality in the different areas of the cod recovery zone. There was also the prospect that the Commission would introduce emergency technical measures in January to ensure that that happened.

I was able to agree an objective with the local industry that, by July, our fleet would be fishing with gears that would enable them to be exempt from the effort control regime imposed by the cod plan. That means that the net must be capable of reducing the cod catch to below 1·5%. During the negotiations, that commitment was communicated to the Commission, and I have no doubt that it strengthened our position and enabled the Commission to be persuaded by our arguments. That commitment does not mean fishing with the Swedish grid, but that option is available to anyone in the fleet who wants to use it. Our industry dislikes that particular solution, because it considers it inappropriate to the vessels and to the geometry of the nets used in the Irish Sea prawn fisheries. It also has concerns about health and safety, storage of the device and loss of commercial catch. Industry representatives made those points very clearly during our meeting.

We cannot continue to simply say that the cod plan has not worked without offering alternatives. I am optimistic

that the experience and ingenuity of local fishermen can be used to come up with the very best solution, which will not only contribute to the objectives of the cod plan but be suitable and easily used by our fleet. Just last week, in partnership with the industry, we had the first meeting of a Seafish-led gear trials project, which my Department is funding through the European Fisheries Fund. The project team includes representatives from our two producer organisations, local net makers, Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) scientists and the Deaprtment of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) policy officials. As originally envisaged, the project provided for trialling three different gear types on twin-rig and single-rig trawlers for 45 days, full observer coverage, project administration and production of a scientific report for submission to STECF. The project team identified five designs for highly selective gears for trialling. We will extend the scope of the project to accommodate that. We intend to succeed in this endeavour because a successful outcome will ensure that our prawn fleet, which represents about 95% of local trawlers, will be able to fish the prawn quota unfettered by restrictions on the number of days it can spend at sea.

12.15 pm

I now turn to the outcomes for the fish stocks that are of interest to our local fleet. It should come as no surprise to Members that the area VII nephrops — prawns — TAC was my key negotiating position. That stock is the lifeblood of the County Down fleet. Our fleet catches around £15 million worth of nephrops, mainly from grounds in the northern part of the Irish Sea. The gross turnover of the processing firms that depend on that fleet amounts to around £70 million. The Commission proposed a cut of 19%, and, although it had concerns about the state of the stocks in some areas within area VII, the Commission's proposal was disproportionate. Furthermore, newer information indicated that nephrops stocks on the Porcupine Bank off the west coast of Ireland had responded positively to management measures put in place last year.

I worked closely with my counterpart in the South, Simon Coveney TD, and our officials developed a joint paper, which was given to the Commission in December. That set out an approach that took account of the scientific advice and fishing patterns of the member states involved in the fishery. Simon and I used other opportunities at meetings with the Commission during the Council to press our case on nephrops.

There was no movement from the Commission until the second compromise text produced late on the second day of Council, in which the Commission reduced the cut to 5%. Undoubtedly, the lengthy negotiations on fishing effort and selectivity measures had a bearing on that timing. After further interventions by Ministers at the final plenary session of the Council, it was finally agreed that the nephrops TAC would remain unchanged. That was an excellent outcome. It means that the fishing opportunities for 95% of our local fleet will be maintained for 2012.

The Commission introduced a new policy this year of automatic TAC cuts where a full analytical assessment of the stock was not available. The Commission classed all such stocks as data-poor and proposed that they be cut by 25%. That was a completely arbitrary figure that had no scientific basis. The policy was strongly opposed by many countries, and a key objective was to get the Commission to consider the stocks on their merits and make use of the science available.

In spite of the same strong science for Irish Sea herring that earned an increase in the TAC last year, the Commission initially proposed a cut of 25%, again because of the absence of analytical assessment. The acoustic assessments of population size for the past four years indicate a very significant increase in herring abundance in the Irish Sea. Recent acoustic survey biomass estimates are higher than at any time in the past 18 years, and there is evidence that recent recruitment has been high. Therefore, it was extremely disappointing and frustrating that the final settlement resulted in a 10% cut for Irish Sea herring, bringing the TAC back to the level it was at from 2002 to 2010. This is a clear case of the Commission not following the science. The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) advice for "no increase in catch" would suggest that the 2011 TAC should have been maintained. Ministers continued to press for a rollover during the final plenary session, but the Commission declined to move on that.

The outcome for herring is also disappointing because very significant progress has been made in developing a strong working relationship between fisheries managers, scientists and the processing and catching industry sectors. On a positive note, the stock will undergo an in-depth review by ICES in 2012, and that benchmarking process will incorporate further survey information that has not been included by ICES. I hope that that benchmark will pave the way for the introduction of a long-term management plan during 2012 and that the fishery will achieve MSC accreditation at the earliest opportunity thereafter.

As for other so called data-poor stocks, the initial 25% proposed reduction for Irish Sea haddock was revised to a 5% reduction; the figure for Irish Sea plaice was eventually unchanged after an initial cut of 25% was proposed; and the figure for area VII anglerfish was reduced by 5% rather than the 25% cut initially proposed.

Irish Sea cod, sole and whiting remain in a poor state and received significant cuts. The Commission revised its proposal for Irish Sea cod where no cod could be caught to a 25% cut in the current quota, which is in line with the cod plan. The commitment made to move the nephrops fleet to more selective gears would have had a bearing on that outcome. Irish Sea sole was cut by 44% and whiting by 25%. However, those stocks are of little financial significance to the local fleet and are taken as by-catch.

The Clyde herring quota, which is fished mainly by our pelagic trawlers, has still to be decided. That will fall to the UK under arrangements that allow member states to determine the quota if the entire stock lies within that member state's waters.

I appreciate the opportunity to bring Members up to date on the outcome of the autumn fisheries negotiations as far as they affect our fleet. In copies of the statement that was circulated earlier to Members I provided summary tables that show the movements in the total allowable catch and the tonnages involved. I put on record my thanks to my colleagues Richard Benyon in DEFRA, Richard Lochhead in

the Scottish Government and Simon Coveney in the South for their strong support throughout the negotiations.

Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): I thank the Minister for her statement on this important subject and meeting. When it met most recently last weekend, the Committee was provided with and considered a written briefing from the Department on the outcome of the meeting of the Fisheries Council. It is fair to say that the Committee believes that the Minister achieved a reasonable outcome in a difficult situation. I also want to put it on record that the First Minister, Peter Robinson, made a direct telephone intervention with the UK Fisheries Minister, Richard Benyon MP, in Brussels at 1.00 am on Saturday 17 December to reinforce the importance of the fishing industry in Northern Ireland. I commend him for that.

Committee members and I are concerned about the medium- and long-term future of Northern Ireland's fishing industry. It has to go through what can only be described as a poker game every year in order to find out its quotas for the following year. It is extremely difficult for the industry to plan and, more importantly, to invest in the future when it does not know what that future really holds. What is the Minister doing to avoid that yearly poker game scenario?

I urge the Minister to ensure that AFBI's science research facilities are up to scratch and complement and are prepared and able to provide the necessary documentation and evidence to Europe to enable it to make informed decisions. I know that there have been problems there lately. It is hard for local fishermen to see that there is an imaginary line which has, on one side, a 60% increase in herring and cod and, on the other, a 9% decrease. It is extremely difficult for the fishing industry to get around that.

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Committee Chairperson for his comments. It was a successful negotiation for prawn fisheries, which equate to 95% of the entire industry, due to the fact that we were able to argue away the 19% cut.

I absolutely agree with the Chairperson's comments on longer-term plans. The longer term is closely connected to the common fisheries policy reform, which will come to the fore in the next year or 18 months. We need to support the industry to be productive and competitive and to continue its work and fish in a sustainable way. Key issues will have to be dealt with under the common fisheries policy, such as regions having more decision-making and being able to decide their own destiny. That will be important when it comes to all the negotiations that will happen under the common fisheries policy. It will be key to our ability to change things.

With regard to the annual bartering that we have to do every December in those discussions and quota negotiations, I absolutely agree with the Chairperson that we should not have to do that dance every year. How can the fishing industry plan for the future if it is unsure from year to year? It can have a business plan for only one year at a time. Therefore, I absolutely agree with the Chairperson. We need to continue to make that case strongly to the Commission in common fisheries policy negotiations.

As regards stocks, the Commission is very reliant on science. The deal secured by Scotland and by Simon Coveney in the South was always based on the ICES advice that their stocks were at a particular level whereas ours were, perhaps, not at that level. That leads to the differential. I hope that that answers the Chairperson's question.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement and praise her and the Department for their negotiation skills in Brussels. My question concerns selective gear and the Swedish grid. I have spoken to skippers, and they are very concerned, as their vessels cannot be adapted to this particular gear. Will the Minister outline her thinking on the selective gear and, particularly, the Swedish grid?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, absolutely. In advance of the December Council meeting, the Commission was of the view that the Swedish grid should be imposed on our industry, but the industry is adamant that it will not work with the vessels that we have in our prawn fisheries. Therefore, we had to go to Brussels on 5 December and put that case strongly. We had to argue with the Commission that this is not the way to go and that we will not accept the grid being imposed on us. At a meeting prior to that, I agreed the way forward with the industry and the position that I was going to put to the Commission, which was that we would work towards a selective gear that will be acceptable to the local fishing industry and the Commission by July 2012.

Following negotiation with the Commission, we won a reprieve and an opportunity for our local industry to come up with its own solutions. Therefore, that is positive. A lot of work will be done over the next six months to allow that to happen and to support the industry, through AFBI and the Department, in coming up with the best selective gear that will allow less by-catch of cod.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for her statement. Minister, I note your commitment to review the Irish Sea herring stock in February, following the damaging 10% cut in the total allowable catch. Will you give a guarantee that you will seek a mid-year increase in that quota following your review?

Mrs O'Neill: In February, ICES will take a very in-depth look at the herring stock and the science involved. Hopefully, that will give us the position to go back to the Commission and argue that a closer look should be taken. The first step will be to get a successful outcome from the ICES benchmarking exercise and then see what we can do with that afterwards. I expect that the Commission will want to see some sort of long-term management plan in place before it agrees to any significant uplift in the quota, and, obviously, that will be the case that we will be taking. The information that we get from ICES in February will be the key to planning the way forward.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for her statement. I am sure that the Minister will acknowledge that fishing remains a perilous occupation and will join me in expressing condolences to those who lost loved ones off the coast of west Cork at the weekend.

In the Minister's statement and in her reply to the Chairperson of the Committee, she referred to the sciences and the need to invest and plan. If I have picked the Minister up correctly, she suggested that the Irish Government were able to do better because of the science presented to them by the Commission and that the science that the British Government and, indeed, her own Department, presumably, provided was not accepted by the Commission. Will the

Minister explain why the Commission chooses to disregard evidence provided to it? Can she explain why that might be the case? Is it the case that the Commission does not have confidence in the evidence produced by the Minister?

Mrs O'Neill: I also extend condolences to the families who lost loved ones in the vessel in Cork. The Member may have picked me up wrongly, or maybe I did not relay the information properly, but, when it comes to the Commission making its decision, it depends on ICES advice, which is its own independent advice and not the Department's advice. I will give you an example. For the herring stock, we went out with very strong acoustic data which we did not have before and which, I thought, was quite strong. We put that case to the Commission very strongly, but it decided — foolishly, I think — to ignore that advice and go with its own advice. Therefore, all negotiations depend on the stock levels and where you are fishing. It depends whether you are fishing in the Irish Sea, the Celtic Sea or the North Sea and what the stock levels are like in those areas.

I will give you another example. Following strong ICES advice, it was recommended that the west coast of Scotland would have a 400% increase in its TAC because that still kept them to the maximum sustainable yield.

That is the difference; it was not that our science was not right. Everyone is fishing different areas, and it depends on the stocks in those areas.

12.30 pm

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for her statement and for the work and effort that she and her team put into the negotiations. The Minister referred to the evidence that herring levels in the Irish Sea had improved. She said that she will go back to the European Commission to inform it of that. We urgently need information on those stock levels so that we can get our factories working and keep jobs in Northern Ireland. When will the Minister be in a position to go back to Brussels and tell the Commission that there are sufficient stocks in the Irish Sea? That would allow more of the fishing people in Northern Ireland to get in there and the fishing industry to carry on.

(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Molloy] in the Chair)

Mrs O'Neill: We have just over 100 fishing vessels, two of which fish for herring. However, the herring stock is obviously important to those two vessels in the pelagic fleet.

I intend to go back to Brussels to argue the case. However, we need to get the information in February from the bench-marking exercise, which is being carried out by the independent scientific body ICES. It will provide the information that we hope will support what we have consistently told the Commission: that the stocks are good. In fact, they are at a better level than they have been at any time in the past 18 years. That information stands up on its own, but we need the independent scientific advice to help us to put that case to the Commission. After February, we will be in a better position to go back to Brussels and argue that case.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for her statement. Does she accept that it is ridiculous that there will be a 10% cut in the Irish Sea herring quota when herring stocks are at a higher level than they have been at any time in the past 18 years? Will the Minister do everything that she can to redress that?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. I absolutely agree. As I said in my two previous answers, the scientific evidence that we brought to the Commission was perfectly adequate and showed that our stocks are in a really good state. We need to drive that home with the Commission. As I said, the independent benchmarking exercise in February will hopefully give us the information that will help us to fight our case in Europe.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement, and I congratulate her and her team for negotiating on behalf of our fishing industry. Will the Minister tell the House whether the reform of the common fisheries policy will allow us to set our own regional quotas?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As the Member will be aware, all our waters are shared. Therefore, we will never be in a position to set our own quotas uniquely and unilaterally. However, what I am looking for from the reform of the common fisheries policy is meaningful regionalisation arrangements that will allow us to set our own destiny. Locally, that will mean that those with a direct interest in fishing in the Irish Sea will have greater control of their management plans, and we will be able to set our own management plans for our own fish stocks. It will also mean that any technical measures that are required to implement those plans can be locally driven. It is likely that the management plans will establish the framework for managing stocks sustainably, and that may include our being able to set the rules for our annual quotas.

Mr Wells: The Minister spoke at length about her contacts with her counterpart in the Irish Republic. However, she will of course know that she was part of the British delegation that was negotiating in Brussels, and that she was part of a team that was composed of the Minister from Westminster, the Minister from Scotland and her.

During those discussions as part of the British delegation, did the Minister have any discussions on the payment of compensation to the hard-pressed fishing industry in Northern Ireland? If the state takes the decision to restrict the ability of our industry to catch and process fish, it is only right that we compensate the industry for that loss. In all the discussions and in her statement, there was no mention of any form of compensation after yet another round of cuts to our fishing industry.

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Yes, I was part of the British delegation, but not by choice. However, I do what I have to do, and I will fight the case for the local industry. The December Council meeting was not about compensation, but about setting quotas for the year ahead. Compensation was not discussed this time, but I am happy to keep the Member updated if it comes up in Europe and we have those discussions.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for her statement. In it, she referred to cod mortality in the cod recovery zone and the prospect that the Commission could introduce emergency technical measures in January. If those measures are introduced, how will they affect our fleet and our fishing industry? Could those technical measures be applied across other species as well?

Mrs O'Neill: The technical measures to which I referred are those that the Commission had considered imposing on the industry. We were successful in negotiating an agreement that that would not happen and that our industry would come up with its own solution by July 2012. That was the position that we were going to find ourselves in if we had not been able to successfully negotiate our own way forward, which we have been able to do.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I commend the Minister's work and join with others in the House in congratulating her and her team on what was another very difficult negotiation. Our main catch is nephrops, and there is a rollover in that stock; that is something that should be welcomed by the House. I also want to put on record my thoughts for the families of the fishermen lost at sea this weekend and to remind the House that fishing is a very difficult livelihood. The current unsatisfactory way of conducting negotiations in Brussels does not make the Minister's job very easy.

Mrs O'Neill: Again, I extend my condolences to those families who have been affected by the incident at the weekend. Michelle will agree with me that the negotiations were long and protracted, but we got a good outcome. The fact that we were able to secure no cuts to 95% of our fishing fleet was a very good outcome and a good place to start. We will just have to keep fighting the case for the other stocks and putting the science to the Commission. I hope that we will be able to get better outcomes on herring and the other stocks in the future.

Ms Ritchie: I thank the Minister for her statement. I am sure that she will agree that the fish quota allocation for the various fish species on an annual basis makes a strong contribution to underpinning the fishing industry in the offshore and onshore County Down ports and to sustaining local employment. Will she, therefore, indicate what her stance is on trying to ensure that the cod industry has a future? What is being done to advance the sentinel fishery proposal, and — on a real basis, with the UK Fisheries Minister — to bring forward regionalisation for the fishing industry in Northern Ireland for herring, cod and prawns?

Mrs O'Neill: The need for, and the format and extent of, the sentinel fishery, or scientific cod fishery, cannot be assessed properly prior to the completion of the ICES benchmark process, which, as I said earlier, will take place in February. However, following that exercise, we will have a clear idea of what the scientific objectives should be. That will also help us to determine the overall scope of any scientific fishery that would be required at that stage. AFBI and DEFRA's scientific officers intend to use the benchmark process to highlight the problems and then propose a way forward, which gives us an opportunity to explore the sentinel fishery proposal in more detail and what it is that we need.

We have consistently said that the cod recovery plan does not work and will not work. The Commission has now acknowledged that the plan does not work. When the cod recovery plan was put on the table by the Commission, Conor Murphy, who was at the negotiation for Michelle Gildernew, argued the case that it would not work and that it was not the way to go, but, unfortunately, that argument fell on deaf ears in the Commission. We need to continue to monitor and properly review the cod recovery plan. If it does not work, we will need to look again at how else we can improve our cod stocks without disadvantaging our local fishing industries.

Regionalisation is part of the common fisheries policy reform. We are looking closely at that, because, as I have consistently said in answer to other questions, we need to be able to control our own destiny, allow our fishermen to plan for the future and not go through the annual dance with the quota negotiations.

Miss M McIlveen: Can the Minister give us a definitive timescale for any announcement on fishing vessel decommissioning?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat. I thought that I would have been in a better position or further on at this stage as regards decommissioning, but I listened to the processing sector, which had concerns that were not highlighted to me previously about how removing some boats will affect it. So, I had to factor that into the business case, which is now going to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). Once I get word back from DFP that it has cleared the business case, I hope to be in a position in the next month to announce that and move forward. However, I had to be careful to take into account the views of the fishing industry and the processors, who depend very heavily on the stocks coming in.

Mr McCallister: I welcome the Minister's statement and the fact that, as a new Minister, she resisted the temptation to blame her predecessor for all the failings.

The Minister accepts that the cod recovery plan has not worked. How does she see us truly engaging with the local industry, bringing the ingenuity that she mentioned in her statement to the fore and getting the Commission to accept what is happening locally in our waters and making it trust in our science? It seems to accept the science that suits it and ignore the science that does not.

Mrs O'Neill: I agree with you. The herring stock is a good example of where we had sound scientific evidence yet it still based the decision on its own evidence. We got some improvement by moving from a 25% cut to a 10% one, but it was still not exactly what we wanted.

The cod recovery plan does not work, and the Commission has now acknowledged that and reviewed it. However, throughout the rest of this year, we expect the Commission to take a step back and take a proper look at the cod recovery plan. When we are out in Europe arguing the case that it does not work, we need to offer alternatives and ask how else we can protect our cod stocks and allow them to grow. As I said, the ingenuity in our fishing industry is evident. So, I will continue to work with the industry on a plan that we can put to the Commission to allow us to improve. The fact that we are moving to selective gear, which will be a local solution, is a very positive step forward, and we can possibly put that to the Commission. It has welcomed that, and that was reflected in the December negotiations.

Mr Allister: This outcome looks very much like another nail in the coffin of the white fish sector, in that there has been a huge 25% cut in the cod quota and a 25% cut in the days at sea. Has that sector got a future? What is the Minister's strategy to provide it with a future? Or has she abandoned

it and written it off? In that regard, is she anticipating decommissioning for it?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The proposed cut to Irish Sea whiting was 44%; it is now down to 25%. The Irish Sea whiting is of little financial significance to our industry. As I said earlier, 95% of our fleet depends on prawns or nephrops. When it comes to negotiations in Brussels, you have to prioritise what is most important for the industry, and, in this case, it was days at sea and prawns. The 5% that is left, which is made up of Irish Sea sole, plaice, herring and whiting, is not of massive financial significance to the industry. However, we need to continue to argue the case that any boats that fish for Irish Sea whiting should be allowed to do so where stocks are good. If our stocks are low, we need to take more conservative measures. That is the way forward.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her statement. I want to put my environment hat on. the Minister talked about the west of Scotland and the North Sea, but we do not seem to be looking at sea angling or inshore fishing, which we are told is worth between £600 million and £1,300 million to the UK. That could be worth a great deal to us in Northern Ireland, yet we do not seem to have any regulations that look at how we look after the nursery beds and inshore fishing. The Minister talked about stocks, but we need to look at the modiolus, cockles, whelks, sea bass, brown and velvet crabs, lobsters and much more. Has she any plans to look at regulating and protecting our inshore fisheries?

12.45 pm

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat. The inshore fisheries sector obviously has an important contribution to make, and there is loads of scope for its further development. We want to be in the position of having an inshore fisheries strategy, and I have tasked AFBI with looking at that. It will be a strategy as well as a review of data requirements so that we can improve our stock assessment. I am happy to keep the Member informed as that moves forward.

Helm Housing

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): On 23 March 2011, my predecessor informed the Assembly that, because of the initial findings of my Department's inspection, Helm Housing had been suspended from the social housing development programme and was not permitted to undertake any further development of new stock. I can now inform you that the work of the inspection team has been concluded and that its final report is due to be published on the Department's website this afternoon.

The report highlights a number of significant failures of control and breaches of compliance across all business areas, which were the areas subject to inspection. Those indicate significant and substantial failings by the senior management team and a failure by the board to effect an adequate challenge function to the decision-making process in the association. This statement is qualified by the inspection team's awareness that, on occasions, the board either had not been fully briefed by the senior management team or had been misinformed by it. Some of the main issues identified were procurement procedures not being followed; breaches of statutory approvals; incorrect use of consultants; incorrect procedures for procurement of land; non-compliance with the housing association guide; and the use of middlemen or site finders.

The nature of the issues — especially in property development, which accounts for the provision of new housing stock — meant that the inspection team carried out a detailed examination of a significant number of development schemes to determine whether housing association grant had been improperly claimed. The outcome of that work confirmed the extent of non-compliance with procedures. However, it also established that, with the exception of four schemes, the grant was used for the purpose for which it was intended, namely to provide social housing in Northern Ireland. The amount of grant that falls to be recovered is £669,000, of which £142,000 has already been recouped. Discussions are ongoing about the recovery of the balance.

In that regard, I acknowledge the response of the board of Helm Housing to the findings. The board has acted with openness and integrity throughout the inspection and subsequent discussions and has demonstrated a keenness to address all of the issues raised. The board has appointed a new interim chief executive with a proven track record of dealing with ailing associations across Great Britain and recruited three new board members, with plans in place to make further changes in board personnel over the coming months. A significant number of changes have already been effected in the senior management team, and an action plan to address all of the issues is being developed.

My primary concern in achieving a long-term solution to the problems that we have encountered in Helm is that security of tenure and the quality of service being provided to Helm tenants be safeguarded. I am pleased with the response to date of the Helm board in making progress towards those objectives. It has already taken action and is planning to take further action to ensure the effective delivery of services to tenants, and my Department will scrutinise the response to the serious issues identified in the report.

I also want to say something about the wider housing association movement. Clearly, it was important that I

established whether the issues identified in Helm were also present elsewhere. To that end, the inspection team conducted a series of targeted inspections of the seven associations that received the highest level of housing association grant over the past three years. I am pleased to report that six of the seven associations inspected have received a satisfactory or better assurance rating, with the seventh receiving a qualified limited assurance rating. From that work, I am content that the significant control issues identified within Helm are limited to that association.

My Department has also increased the staffing levels within the governance and inspection team to increase the level of monitoring of associations throughout the year to ensure that the lessons learned from the Helm inspection are promulgated across the housing movement. Moving forward, I can assure you that I and my Department take very seriously robust governance of the housing association movement, and we will not hesitate to take action where required. Helm Housing is one of seven associations currently suspended from the social housing development programme. I have also asked my officials to consider what further actions might be taken to improve the regulatory regime.

Let me conclude by saying that the provision of affordable, well-managed social housing is one of my key priorities. I firmly believe that the housing association movement has had in the past, and will have in the future, a central role to play in the delivery of that priority. Much good work in the sector is carried out by dedicated and competent staff, delivering services for over 33,000 households. My vision is for a sector that strives for continuous improvement and that has the highest standards of governance, accountability and delivery, and I will work with the sector to see that vision delivered. In my view, the inspection process, as an accountability tool and a driver for improvement, is an important mechanism to help achieve that.

Mr A Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, Principal Deputy Speaker. I thank the Minister for his statement on the important issue of the Helm housing association. I remind Members that there has been quite considerable public concern over this matter for some time, and it was important that the Department carried out a thorough investigation into the concerns expressed.

I thank the Minister for outlining the range of issues that the report found to give justifiable cause for considerable concern: the significant levels of compliance failure on issues of procurement, breaches of statutory approvals, incorrect procedures for the procurement of land, and so on. I place it on record that the Committee will in due course, but as early as possible, consider in full the detail of the report and the fallout from it. Nevertheless, it is important to say at the outset that those failures are absolutely unacceptable. It is important that the current Minister and his predecessor have made that clear. More importantly, they have taken the necessary steps to make sure that there is no repeat of this.

It is important to say that, notwithstanding all of the breaches of compliance that were identified, there has been absolutely no suggestion of fraudulent or illegal use of any public funding. In fact, we are advised that, from a sample of somewhere in the region of £88 million of public funding that went to Helm Housing, it has been declared that only somewhere in the region of £600,000 has to be recovered from that association by the Department, and the Minister stated that more than £120,000 of that has already been secured.

The response from the association has clearly been important. Significant changes have already been made: senior personnel have left or are due to leave and there have been significant changes at board level. Clearly, the failures identified in the report are absolutely unacceptable and it is important to root them out. The inspection went beyond Helm and activities around it to look at a number of other significant housing associations as well. It is important that we establish whether there has been any such bad practice elsewhere, and, where it has not happened, that also needs to be identified. What is important here —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: May I bring you to a question?

Mr A Maskey: OK. Thank you, Principal Deputy Speaker. I will come to that in a moment. To make the point on behalf of the Committee: clearly it is important that the public funding going to those associations is monitored robustly. It is also important that the rights and entitlements of tenants of those associations are guaranteed. Will the Minister reaffirm to the House that the Department will be fully given its own capacity to make sure that the inspection regime will also be much more robust in the future?

Mr McCausland: I thank the Chairman for his comments. A review of future inspections is under way. We see that as strengthening powers and regulation over the next while. The lessons that have been learned from Helm are being taken into account. We will ensure that we are robust, as we have been in the past, in that regard. I think the inspections that have been carried out on the seven larger associations indicate that the Department takes the matter very seriously and is committed to the highest standard of inspection and regulation for the sector.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Minister for his statement. I suppose that, when such a statement is necessitated because of problems that have occurred, there are usually two questions that come to the mind of most members of the public, or variations of the two. The first is: has every step possible been taken to ensure that the moneys are being recovered? The Minister answered that in part. Maybe he can outline what other steps are being taken. The other issue is around action that needs to be taken to ensure that there is no repetition, particularly by some of the associations that are not as large as those that have been investigated.

Mr McCausland: As the Member indicated, we have recovered £142,000 in regard to a site in Newtownards. There are three other sites for which grant is to be recovered, and work is under way in that regard.

Other housing associations were mentioned. The Department has taken a number of actions on that front. First, in regard to the Helm inspection findings, the Department carried out a programme of targeted inspections that focused primarily on the development activities of the major developing associations in Northern Ireland. As I said, six of the seven associations inspected received a satisfactory or better assurance rating. The seventh received a qualified limited assurance rating. Based on that work, I am content that the significant control issues identified within Helm are limited to that association.

The Department also increased the staffing levels of the governance and inspection team to increase the level of monitoring of associations throughout the year. It has promulgated the lessons learned from the Helm inspection across the sector. We also sought additional legislative powers to deal with poorly performing associations, and we met the banks and financial institutions to restore their confidence in Helm and the housing movement generally. I assure the House that everything possible is being done to ensure the future of a vibrant housing association sector in Northern Ireland.

Mr Copeland: I also thank the Minister for performing what must have been an unpalatable task this morning in bringing these matters before us. I also echo the views and comments of the Chair of the Committee for Social Development.

To get into too much detail at this stage would not be practicable or useful. I prefer to limit my comments at this stage and study the report in its entirely when it becomes available. However, I ask the Minister to assure us that the failings and circumstances that occasioned the report resided solely within Helm Housing. Did any investigations take place into any other agencies or departments of government that perhaps should have or could have ensured that it would not have been in a position to act in the way that it did?

1.00 pm

Mr McCausland: Helm Housing was inspected in 2006. On a four-yearly cycle of inspection, it was due to be inspected in 2010, but, prior to that, information was coming forward and stories were being reported about certain difficulties. Therefore, that inspection was particularly important, and it uncovered the issues that I mentioned today.

I said that we have inspected the next seven larger associations, which, altogether, cover three quarters of the housing association sector in Northern Ireland. Nothing untoward similar to the situation at Helm has come to light there. The inspection process is ongoing on a regular rolling basis with other housing associations, and the intention in the future might be to move from a four-yearly to a three-yearly inspection cycle to ensure that we keep the maximum level of scrutiny that is appropriate for the sector.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I also thank the Minister for his report, which, as other Members said, outlines a litany of shortcomings in and wrongdoings by an organisation with public money. It is very welcome that improvements have been made to the regulatory regime and that the possibility of similar abuses in the future has been eradicated. Will the Minister outline in more detail the limited assurance that was given to one of the housing associations in the recent audit?

Mr McCausland: I do not have the full detail of that particular inspection. However, I will simply say that that association was to have put certain measures in place. When the inspection was carried out, those measures had not fully worked their way through and we were therefore not able to assess the association post those changes. However, I have every confidence in that association, and I am also confident that those measures have been put in place and that things are now in a much better shape there. The factors that can lead to a housing association's getting limited assurance can be to do with a wide range of issues. It is a very comprehensive inspection, and, if you fall down in a couple of the areas, you can get that limited assurance. That has now been put right for that particular association, but, as the Member is probably aware, there are still, I think, seven associations that are not able to develop at the present time. We need to be working with those that are in that difficult situation to get them into better shape and fit for purpose so that we have as effective a housing association sector as possible.

Mr Easton: I thank the Minister for his statement. If Helm is to pay the £500,000 back on the grants to the Department, what is the Minister's position on how Helm will be financially?

Mr McCausland: That is really a question for the chief executive of Helm to answer, but I assure the Member that the Department has been in joint discussions with Helm's lenders. There is no doubt about the liquidity of the association. The lenders are content with the action that has been taken and with their future prospects. In fact, they have already released in excess of £5 million of further funding. That is a clear indication of the confidence of financial institutions in Helm housing. I think that that is encouraging for us, for the association and for the association's tenants.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I too thank the Minister for his statement. Minister, you said that Helm is one of seven associations that is currently suspended. Do you think that that situation will impact on the number of social houses that your Department has pledged to provide in the coming year?

Mr McCausland: I do not think that it impacts on the level of social housing provision in Northern Ireland. Generally, if an association is not able to develop, a particular scheme moves over to another association and the work is carried forward. As regards Helm in particular, its withdrawal from the social housing development programme really has no impact. Any schemes are automatically transferred to another association. The top seven developing associations are responsible for delivering over 70% of the housing programme. They have been confirmed as being in order and have been given a clean bill of health, and I think that that is reassuring for the entire social housing development programme.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his statement on this very important issue. Is he prepared to state whether it is the Department's intention to reduce the number of housing associations and have economies of scale? Does he accept that the Rural Housing Association has a unique and particular piece of work to do in trying to have social housing in rural areas? Does he recognise that it may be a special case that should remain independent?

Mr McCausland: The number of housing associations will fall — there is no doubt about that — because some have already merged. We have over 30 at the moment. Northern Ireland is a very small place, and many people would see having 30 or more housing associations as excessive. The number has already been reduced through a number of mergers, and others are well under way. Even in my constituency, four associations are seeking to merge into one.

There are economies of scale, but, for me, the key issue is the capacity and capability of housing associations to deliver on the task before them. In addition to mergers, we can look at collaboration and shared services between associations. We already have procurement groups, and such co-operation and collaboration could be extended. There are good reasons why we should have fewer associations, but that process needs to be taken forward carefully and sensitively.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for his statement. I concur with the Chair of the Committee for Social Development that it was a thorough investigation, and I commend the officials. Did the investigation uncover any evidence of fraudulent activity in Helm Housing?

Mr McCausland: The inspection confirmed that the grant given by the Department to Helm was used for the purpose for which it was intended: to provide social housing. The Department's inspections did not highlight any indication of fraudulent activity. The Department considers that the issues arising out of that inspection were a result of senior management control failures. There is one scheme, Great Georges Street, into which inquiries continue, and the Department is working with the association to bring the work to a conclusion. However, I can assure the Member that the inspections have not identified or highlighted any indication of fraudulent activity.

Mr G Kelly: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. One of the issues is around middlemen — or middle women for that matter — and site finders. There is concern in north Belfast about a couple of sites in particular. What does the Department intend to do about that? Is it a matter of cutting out that type of action? I understand that, in one case, a site was bought and sold for a £3 million profit. Will any regulations be brought in, or have any regulations been agreed, to try to deal with those issues?

Mr McCausland: The difficulty that the inspection team raised with the use of middlemen or site finders was, in this case, the failure of the association fully to identify the role of the middlemen. Who were they working for? What was their financial interest or reward? What value did they add to the land deal? There needs to be clarity on those things. It is the Department's intention to bring out clear guidance on property and land acquisitions that will advise the associations of the risks associated with such deals and recommend procedures to manage such risks.

Mr Hamilton: The reference to the failure to comply with community consultation and the resulting recouping of £142,000 from Helm relates, as the Minister confirmed, to a case that I know well in West Street in Newtownards, where the residents of Old Market Square were treated by Helm with arrogance verging on contempt. Will the Minister assure the House that any recommendations resulting from the inspection that deal with the need for community consultation will be enacted in full?

Mr McCausland: I agree with the Member that that is a very important issue. Community consultation should be very much to the fore in the thinking of housing associations and is something that needs to be taken forward.

Mr Allister: Just to carry forward Mr Douglas's line of inquiry, has there been any police investigation, or is there any basis upon which to seek a police investigation, given that, in other cases where procurement has been at issue, the police have been readily consulted?

In relation to the board, there is a finding that the board failed:

> *"to effect an adequate challenge function to the decision-making process".*

Has that resulted in any changes of personnel on the board?

It has been reported that this came to light as a result of a whistle-blower's information, not as a result of the Department's own investigations. If that is correct, what does it say about the adequacy, at that point, of the Department's own investigative functions?

Mr McCausland: The Member poses three questions. I will take them in reverse order. As regards the whistle-blower prompting the inspection or highlighting the failings, the inspection of Helm was scheduled in October 2009, as a normal round 2 inspection. Prior to the commencement of the inspection, the Department was aware of a few Helm schemes that had attracted media attention. However, there was no indication that the problems within Helm were as significant or endemic as subsequently transpired. There was also no whistle-blower or third-party information to indicate any problems on the scale identified. The findings of this report have come about by the application of the Department's own robust inspection process. That should reassure the Member in that regard. The inspection process has been robust, and in future will be even more so.

The Member raised the issue of police involvement. I am not aware of anything in that regard. This is an inspection that has been brought forward. There is no indication that anything fraudulent has taken place and, therefore, I anticipate no reason for police involvement.

The Member raised an important issue as regards the board. The inspection identified failings in relation to the senior management team and the procedures that it operated. There was also a shortcoming and a failure in regard to the board, in that it did not properly carry out its role of challenging the senior management team. In some cases, information that the board should have had access to and which should have been provided to it was not provided. However, the onus is on the board to make sure that it gets the information so that it can interrogate and challenge it.

I commend the board in this regard: it has stuck with it, acknowledged its shortcomings and failures in the past and seen it through to this point. We have now got to the stage where the board has acknowledged that its make-up will change. Three members have already moved on and are being replaced in various ways and, over the next period of time, all the board members will be replaced. It is better that that is done in a managed way, and the Department has been working with the association and has been assured by it in that regard. We want to do it in a managed way because we do not want to cause unnecessary concerns about the future of the association and so on. It has a good and very viable future. It is a very viable organisation, and I am delighted that, with the appointment of an interim chief executive and the other changes that have been and are being made on the staffing side, and those made to the board of the association, its future is bright.

Government Contracts: Payment of Subcontractors

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): On rare occasions, I listen to Radio Ulster in the morning on my way in. This morning, just as I was driving in, they were talking about Ministers and politicians apologising in the Assembly. They asked how many apologies there would be in the current Assembly term.

I will start by apologising to Members, because some of them may have a copy of my statement but find that only half of it was in their pigeonhole, and, therefore, they are not fully aware of all that I am going to say. May I be the first to say that I am not afraid to make an apology when a mistake has been made. I hope that Members will be not be put out too much by the fact that they have not received all the information that they might have expected to have ahead of my making the statement in the Chamber.

1.15 pm

I thank Members for the opportunity to make a statement on the payment of subcontractors engaged in government construction contracts. I requested this opportunity because, unfortunately, it appears that prompt payment by government to main contractors in the construction industry is not always percolating through the supply chain to subcontractors. In common with many Members and ministerial colleagues here today, I have received representations from subcontractors who have had payments unreasonably withheld from them by main contractors. In one case, it was reported to me that the payment was withheld for 17 months after it was due. Why is that happening? What are the reasons for it happening? More importantly, what can we as a Department do to try to stop it?

It is particularly difficult to understand why it happens, given that government has worked hard to improve the promptness of its payments to suppliers and contractors. Departments have made good progress in meeting the 10-day payment target for invoices. My Department, for example, now pays over 95% of its invoices within 10 days. Therefore, the problem is not that the main contractor has not been paid for the work.

Why should the Assembly be concerned? Why should we interfere in the commercial practices of private sector contractors? The reason that it is so important is that the businesses at the receiving end of this unacceptable practice are, more often than not, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), on which we are depending to help rebuild our economy.

Cash flow is the lifeblood of any business. That is particularly true in difficult economic conditions, with a credit crunch restricting the availability of working capital. Lack of cash flow can drive an otherwise healthy and profitable business into insolvency. Small, medium and micro businesses are particularly vulnerable to cash flow difficulties, and their viability can be threatened by the unreasonable withholding of payments due to them.

SMEs are the bedrock of the economy in Northern Ireland. Some 98% of firms here are SMEs, and they account for 67% of employment. Anything that threatens the viability of SMEs may, therefore, have a significant effect on our economy. In the coming years, we will rely on SMEs to drive economic growth and to rebalance the economy. It is important that our SMEs be able to use their working capital to invest in growth rather than the unproductive funding of main contractors.

The Construction Industry Forum for Northern Ireland addressed the issue as far back as 2009. At that time, the industry and government committed to implementing the principles of the code of practice for government construction clients and their supply chains, a key feature of which is the fair treatment of supply chain partners. Those undertakings were enhanced the following year with the inclusion in the code of practice of a model fair payment charter. It states:

> *"Companies have the right to receive correct full payment as and when due. Deliberate late payment or unjustifiable withholding of payment is ethically not acceptable."*

Those are fine words, but I regret to say that not all main contractors are holding up their side of the bargain.

On the government side, the centres of procurement expertise (CoPEs) have implemented a number of measures through their construction contracts to promote fair dealing and prompt payment. Briefly, those include the need for the main contractor to report on payments made to subcontractors at each project meeting and periodic checks on payments to subcontractors being made by the client's project manager.

In my Department, the construction contracts of Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) require the main contractor to submit each subcontract to the client's project manager for acceptance. That gives the project manager the opportunity to object to any less favourable payment terms than are included in the main contract. In addition, CPD, working with the other COPEs, is developing a guidance note on subcontracting for procurement board endorsement early this year. That will clearly set out good practice for public procurement staff to promote involvement and fair treatment of SMEs in supply chains for all government contracts.

The Construction Contracts (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 is due to come into effect later this year. That will improve the legal protection for parties in construction contracts, including subcontractors. That said, subcontractors appear to be reluctant to use the current legislation against main contractors, possibly in the belief that such action will jeopardise their chances of securing future work in a limited local market. I have, therefore, reached the conclusion that the Government need to take further action in support of SMEs, and I am determined that we will do our utmost to address those unacceptable practices.

For some time, I have been frustrated by the inability of government to penalise contractors whose performance does not come up to the mark, allowing them to tender for work when they have performed badly on a previous contract. I am pleased to announce that this is about to change. The procurement board will shortly endorse the publication of a revised procurement guidance note on contract management procedures and principles. That includes a new protocol for managing poor contractor performance. The protocol gives COPEs the authority to issue a certificate of unsatisfactory performance to contractors who persistently fail to deliver on key contractual requirements. Those will be defined in the contract and will include fair payment to subcontractors. The protocol will also

apply to compliance with social clauses in contracts and will help underpin the Programme for Government commitment to include social clauses in all public procurement contracts.

The consequence of receiving a certificate of unsatisfactory performance will be that the contractor will be excluded from tendering for competitions undertaken by COPEs for 12 months. This action demonstrates how seriously I and the procurement board take this matter. I regret that this has been necessary, but voluntary agreements have failed to eradicate the problem of poor payment and, therefore, stronger measures are required.

I also encourage subcontractors to use existing legislation designed to prevent abuse of payment arrangements. Furthermore, I ask them to provide COPEs with specific details of malpractice, rather than broad expressions of dissatisfaction, so that these can be effectively followed up by COPEs. Poor payment is not sustainable economically, and we as customers and taxpayers pay for it in the end through reduced quality, disputes, defaults and company failures.

It is critical that the benefits of government funding are provided not only to main contractors that win government business but to their supply chains. I therefore seek support for the measures that I have outlined in my statement today. I am pleased to take questions.

Mr Murphy (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle, agus go raibh maith agat, a Aire. I welcome the Minister's statement with regard to both the progress being made by Departments in making prompt payments to suppliers and the steps to address compliance by main contractors, including compliance with social clauses. However, perhaps the Minister can address some specific points. The previous Committee highlighted concerns about the performance of arm's-length bodies in relation to prompt payment. What steps can be taken to ensure that arm's-length bodies are making prompt payments to main suppliers, and that subcontractors under those contracts are also receiving prompt payment? For instance, will it be possible for COPEs to issue certificates of unsatisfactory performance to contractors supplying arm's-length bodies?

I welcome the new measures that the Minister has announced. However, will he clarify whether they will apply to all government contracts, including services and supplies, as well as construction?

Mr Wilson: I thank the Chairman for his question. I will take the last part first. This will cover all public procurement. Whatever the COPE happens to be and whatever the Department dealing with contracts for the arm's-length bodies — sometimes arm's-length bodies will have their own COPEs anyway — it will all be covered by this statement. Therefore, if a firm takes out a contract that is covered by the public sector and is part of public procurement, that will be covered in the statement. As far as prompt payments are concerned, I accept the Member's point that there is some variation across Departments. Some perform better than others. I do not have all the figures to hand, but I know that because I answered an Assembly question recently in which I outlined the payments across Departments. There are variations, and that is something that needs to be considered.

By and large across the public sector now, 87% of payments are being made within 10 days and 95% within 30 days. That is the average across the public sector, but there will be variations. We do have, and are improving, our payments to main contractors. Today is about making sure that those payments are passed on once the main contractor has been paid.

Mr Humphrey: The Minister mentioned hearing the report on Radio Ulster this morning. He may also have noted some criticism of procurement, particularly the pre-qualification questionnaire, on the BBC yesterday. What is the Minister doing to simplify the process?

Mr Wilson: I did not listen to the whole of the Radio Ulster programme this morning. I got only a snippet of it; that was enough for me. However, I have seen reports of the criticisms made yesterday. I think that some were ill-founded. I see that Mr McGlone is in his place. For a long-standing Member of the Assembly, who fully understands the way in which financial arrangements work, to suggest, for example, that the Executive are withholding contracts until the final year of the Assembly term so that it looks as though we are spending more in the run-up to the election, shows a rank misunderstanding of how public finance works. Of course, he knows full well that we cannot carry over huge amounts of capital from one year to the next. In fact, I think that we are allowed to carry over only £15 million of capital from one year to the next. We could not possibly have done what has been suggested. So, some of the criticisms are totally unwarranted, and those making them should hang their heads in shame at their lack of understanding as to how this place works.

Another point made was about how difficult pre-qualification was and the amount of work involved. We have been working with the construction industry to simplify the pre-qualification requirements and documentation. All the suggestions brought forward by the industry have been implemented by the Department. I recognise that we want to reduce the amount of bureaucracy for small firms.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his report; it sounds a little bit more powerful. However, I am disappointed. The Minister will remember that, two years ago, we had quite a lot of discussion about subcontractors going to the wall because of non-payment on Government contracts. A raft of measures was brought forward. For example, Constructionline for the housing associations, which ended up having monthly site meetings with all the key stakeholders, including subcontractors, to ensure that they were paid. The Government Construction Clients Group and the Construction Industry Training Board agreed proposals for the introduction of a fair payment charge to be applied with effect from 1 March 2010. I take it, Minister, that all those things have not really worked? Is that the case?

Mr Wilson: If nothing else, I want to be blunt about where we are with all those things. I made it clear in my statement that a lot of the arrangements introduced were put in place after discussions with the construction industry and were, by and large, voluntary.

Those voluntary arrangements have not worked, which is the reason that we are now introducing the idea of a certificate of unsatisfactory performance. It will have real sanctions behind it, and that is the important thing.

1.30 pm

Although I would not say that the voluntary arrangement has not worked at all, it has not worked to my satisfaction. Of course, some events have been overtaken by the recession, which has put more pressure on industry. By the way, let me make this clear in case people misunderstand it: this will cover not just construction contracts but all government procurement contracts. With the recession, of course, firms have cash flow problems, and sometimes main contractors have been tempted to hold on to money. This measure is a way of seeking to ensure that there will be consequences if they do that and are seen to act in an unfair manner, such as taking money for payments that they should have passed on to someone else.

Mrs Cochrane: I, too, welcome the statement on prompt payments and social clauses. Given that the focus of the statement is about sustainability rather than growth, does the Minister foresee the potential for further growth in the construction sector if the 10-day payment deadline for subcontractors is met?

Mr Wilson: First, this is about ensuring that there is fairness. If people work, they ought to be paid for it. Secondly, the measure is about ensuring that we do not put to the wall good businesses, which are required to have a healthy supply chain in place, because they face cash flow problems.

Growth of the sector will happen only if more money goes into the system. This is about using the existing money in the most effective way. Some responsibility lies with government, and we are looking at our capital programme. However, I have to emphasise this issue. We so often talk about rebalancing the economy, and people who talk about that always look to the Government to spend more money. That seems to be a kind of contradiction. However, there has to be an uplift in private sector investment as well. I suppose that one of the jobs that the Assembly can do is try to create the confidence that will allow private sector involvement to come through to give the growth.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Thank you very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an Aire.

I welcome the Minister's statement. Given that smaller subcontractors are further down the supply chain, what practical steps will the Department take to ensure that they are made aware of the protections that exist and are in a position to report malpractice by main contractors?

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for that question. First — it is important that we communicate this — one reason why I wanted to make an early statement on this matter was to flag it up that we are actually doing something about it and are putting something in place. There are a number of means by which we can communicate this information. We will have it on our website, and, when people go to look at what public sector projects are available, they will know that this will be one of the conditions attached to them. Secondly, we can put it in contract documents. Thirdly, to ensure that payments are passed on to subcontractors, we want project managers to be more proactive in the work that they do when payments have been or are submitted and made.

There is, of course, one other thing, and there has been a reluctance to do it: we have to get to the point where people in the industry are prepared to highlight malpractices so that they can be dealt with. There is no point in vague, general condemnations and complaints. If specific complaints are made, we will follow them up.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his comments and wise words. Thank you again, Minister Wilson.

Will the Minister clarify part of his statement? He said:

> *"The consequence of receiving a Certificate of Unsatisfactory Performance will be that the contractor will be excluded from tendering for competitions being undertaken by CoPEs for a period of 12 months."*

First, some people would probably argue that 12 months is pretty negligible, given that the time it takes to get through the PQQ assessment, especially for the likes of NI Water and some other major contracts, can be, I am reliably informed, as long as 14 months. Secondly, will the Minister clarify whether that applies exclusively — it appears from the statement that that is the case — to competitions that are undertaken solely by COPEs? I have written to the Minister, and he has been good to respond. It applies to other public bodies as well.

Mr Wilson: Most public procurement will go through COPEs or some procurement body anyway. Any public sector contract will be covered by the measure. My hope is that we will not have to exclude anyone from the tenders because the threat will introduce good practice into the industry. Obviously, the more people we have tendering, the more competitive a tender becomes. Twelve months was deemed to be a reasonable period for which to exclude people who have received a certificate of unsatisfactory performance. If we have to issue certificates of unsatisfactory performance, it means that the practice has continued. Do not forget that it would not be for a one-off misdemeanour; it would be for continuous misdemeanours and complaints. If that is the case, the whole exercise that we are going through today in trying to get a better regime in place will not have worked. A certificate is almost a sign of failure rather than a sign of success. My hope is that the warning and the sanctions in place will improve the procedures and improve payments so that we do not get to the difficult situations that I have described.

Mr Allister: I welcome the Minister's statement. It is a good initiative to try to address what has been a persistent problem. However, I am concerned lest there is a loophole in it. The Minister anticipates a certificate of unsatisfactory performance resulting in the contractor being excluded from tendering for competitions. However, as the Minister will know, across the board, some people who are a main contractor in one contract will actually be a subcontractor in another and will then have a chain of people below them. The proposal, as drafted, seems to prohibit them only from tendering. Could we, then, have a situation in which they cannot be the main contractor but could still be an important subcontractor? Is the answer not to have the impact of the certificate of unsatisfactory performance to be to prohibit them from working on a government contract, full stop?

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for the point that he has made. When we come forward with initiatives, I continually ask, "What devious ways will people find to get round

them?". People will apply their brain to trying to find ways around the best-laid schemes. I take the point that he has made. A subcontractor would not, as he points out, tender for the contract; it would simply work for a main contractor in the job. Where there has been unsatisfactory performance in one way, there is, of course, potential for unsatisfactory performance further down the line or in other contracts.

The Member will understand that I am not too sure how we can legally stop a main contractor from using certain other firms, if it so desires. However, if there is a way — it needs to be looked at — to ensure legally that bad performance in one area will mean that there is punishment in all other areas of public sector contracts, that is the outcome that I wish to have. If the current proposals will not ensure that outcome, it is important for us to look at whether we can legally close that loophole. I am not saying that it is possible — we do not have complete control over who a main contractor brings in to do work for them — but I will certainly look at it.

Executive Committee Business

Rates (Amendment) Bill: First Stage

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I beg to introduce the Rates (Amendment) Bill [NIA 2/11-15], which is a Bill to amend the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Insolvency (Fees) (Amendment No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I beg to move

> *That the Insolvency (Fees) (Amendment No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 be affirmed.*

The order amends the Insolvency (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2006, known as the principal order, which came into operation in March 2006. It brings the nature and level of fees to be applied by the Northern Ireland Insolvency Service up to date to bring them into line with actual costs.

I will give more detail. First, the order increases the fees payable to the insolvency practitioners appointed by the court to produce reports on debtors' affairs from £345 to £450 for each report submitted. Secondly, it updates article 6 of the principal order, which prescribes a reduction in the fees payable by a bankrupt to the Official Receiver when he is acting as supervisor of an approved individual voluntary arrangement. The amount payable has increased from £462·50 to £525. Thirdly, it increases the Official Receiver's case administration fee for the performance of his duties on the making of a bankruptcy order from £925 to £1,050. It increases the Official Receiver's case administration fee for the performance of his duties on the making of a winding-up order by the court from £1,615 to £1,800. Lastly, it introduces a new scale of percentages to be applied for the Department's administration fee, which is charged on cases with assets over £2,000, but the ceiling for fees to be charged in any single case remains at £80,000.

The amendments proposed to the fees have been agreed with the Department of Finance and Personnel. There is no statutory requirement to consult on the proposals. However, officials of my Department wrote on 18 September 2011 to local insolvency practitioners, recognised professional bodies and members of the advice sector to inform them of the proposed changes in the fees to be applied and give them an opportunity to comment on them. Only one response was received, and, although not in favour of the proposals, Citizens Advice NI acknowledged that there were valid reasons for raising the fees.

Mr Newton: I welcome the Minister's statement. I also thank her officials, who briefed the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and answered the questions posed by members to the extent that the Committee was satisfied with the changes that the Minister is about to make.

I suppose that we should all be concerned by the rise in the workload of the Department in this area. It is unfortunate that, in these economic circumstances, that workload has increased for the Insolvency Service unit of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. It is only right that

we recognise that and that the actions that the Minister is taking will be helpful in recovering costs.

The Minister has been extremely proactive in the sense of the consultation process. Many demands are made in today's society. I recognise that there was no requirement to consult on the legislation. The fact that there was only one response, which was negative towards the legislation, indicates that, in general, those who are engaged in that section of industry are pleased with the way that the legislation is going. Therefore, in summary, the Committee welcomes the changes. The Department briefed the Committee fully. I welcome the changes that the Minister has explained this afternoon.

1.45 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: If no other Members wish to speak, I ask the Minister to respond.

Mrs Foster: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy — I have forgotten your title — Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. It has been a long time since December.

I am grateful for my colleague's comments on the introduction of the statutory rule. I am pleased to note the broad support for it. As I said, it was consulted on even though there was no statutory obligation to do so. I always believe that it is best to try to get broad consensus on these issues. The Member is absolutely correct: unfortunately, we have seen an increase in applications to the service that my Department provides. There is a need for cost recovery, and, with the increase in the number of insolvencies, that need is, obviously, greater.

One question that was raised with me was why it was not possible to pay deposits on insolvency applications by instalments. It emerged that the cost to introduce an instalment-based approach would actually introduce additional costs to the Insolvency Service, which would divert resources from the management of its significant workload. I know that everyone in the House would very much welcome the reduction of that workload, but we recognise that, at present, the Insolvency Service faces a significant workload. If we had taken deposits by instalments, the additional costs may have given rise to having to increase fees even further. I am grateful that everyone has an understanding of the difficulties that we have gone through on cost recovery during the past number of years.

I am thankful for the Committee's scrutiny of the legislation. I welcome the comments that have been made. It is no surprise that Citizens Advice, which provides an absolutely tremendous service to people who have debt difficulties, was not in favour of the legislation. It did, however, acknowledge, as I indicated, that it understood the rationale for having to increase fees. Therefore, I commend the order to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That the Insolvency (Fees) (Amendment No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 be affirmed.*

Health and Social Care Review

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The next item of business is a motion from the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to three hours for the debate. The Minister will have 15 minutes to propose the motion and 15 minutes to make his winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I beg to move

> *That this Assembly takes note of the review of health and social care in Northern Ireland published on 13 December 2011.*

Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, for allowing the motion to be proposed today. As Members will be aware, on 13 December, I made a statement to the Assembly on the review of health and social care services in Northern Ireland. At that time, I said that I believed that it was probably the most important statement that I had made or that I would make on the health and social care system. I remain of that view. I was encouraged by Members' response to my statement during proceedings on that day and by the interest that members of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety showed when I met them on 14 December to brief them on the review. I felt that it was important that Members had an early opportunity to debate the content of the review, once they had had an opportunity to consider its analysis, conclusions and recommendations in more detail. That is why I tabled the motion. The proposals in 'Transforming Your Care' have the potential to reshape the way in which health and social care services will be delivered, and it is important that Members have an opportunity to comment on that to help to inform them of the next steps. Every citizen in Northern Ireland is affected one way or another by health and social care, and I am sure that many in the Chamber will bear testimony to the tireless and valuable work carried out every day by the vast range of health and social care professionals across Northern Ireland.

In my statement on 13 December, I set out a vision for the future of health and social care services in Northern Ireland. It delivers high-quality care for clients and patients, ensures the right clinical and social care outcomes and ensures that patients and clients of services have the best possible experience in every aspect of care. In delivering on that vision, my priorities are to improve and protect health and well-being and reduce inequalities through a focus on prevention and earlier intervention; to improve the quality of services and outcomes for patients, clients and carers, with an emphasis on safety effectiveness and involving service users, as described in our quality strategy, Quality 2020; to be responsive to the modern world by developing more innovative, accessible and responsible services through promoting choice and making more services available in the community; to involve individuals, communities and the independent sector in the design, delivery and evaluation of health and social care services through strengthened local commissioning; to improve productivity by ensuring the effective and efficient allocation and utilisation of all available resources in line with priorities; and to ensure that the most vulnerable, including children, are looked after across all our services.

If we are to deliver an effective health and care system that is built around patients' needs, we cannot continue with the present model. We need to stop doing the things that do not work, challenge out-of-date practices and accept that some services and design are no longer fit for purpose. I initiated the review to examine the future provision of health and social services, including the acute hospital configuration, the development of primary healthcare services and social care and the interface between sectors. The key driver for the review was the very real concern that the system was not sustainable and could not continue to meet our priorities, with potential consequences for patient care and safety. Those concerns were borne out by the findings of the review, which make clear, on the basis of evidence, analysis and extensive engagement with stakeholders, that the full range of health and social care services currently provided is unsustainable in its present form if we want to deliver the best outcomes for everyone and maintain the highest levels of quality and safety in service provision. The report sets out a compelling case for change.

In Northern Ireland, we face a raft of significant and growing pressures. The demographic make-up is changing, with a growing and ageing population. Overall health is poor, and, with the growth in chronic conditions, there are increased demands and an over-reliance on hospital beds. There are advances in medicines and technology and rising public expectations. In my statement on 13 December, I highlighted the fact that Northern Ireland had a population of 1·8 million. It is the fastest growing population in the UK and continues to grow. It is estimated that the number of people over 75 years of age will increase by 40% by 2020 and that the population of 85-year-olds will increase by almost 20% by 2014 and by 58% by 2020 over the 2009 figure. If we fail to respond to those pressures, the consequences will be equally stark. We will have haphazard and unplanned change, resulting in poorer care and treatment with poorer health outcomes.

Without a planned, coherent approach, we will not be able to meet future health needs, and we will fail our health and social care workforce. We need to acknowledge and accept that change is necessary. Indeed, the need for change is heightened in the context of the current very difficult financial and economic climate. Again, I want to be clear. The review was not about cost cutting; rather, it was about quality, accessibility and safety of patient care. What does that mean? It means that we need to ensure a strategic, focused and planned approach to the future delivery of health and social care that responds to the changing environment. We need to be better at preventing ill health by placing a greater emphasis on the promotion of prevention and early intervention measures. To that end, I have tasked officials with developing a new public health strategic framework that will focus on efforts and initiatives to improve health and to reduce health inequalities. We need to ensure that patients receive the right health and social care intervention in the right setting, at the right time and by the most appropriate health and social care provider.

We need to reduce over-reliance on hospital care and instead provide patient-centred care. We need to tackle health inequalities and deliver a high-quality service that is based on the evidence of what is needed and what is right. If we do that in the right way, we will see a society that takes greater responsibility for its own health and well-being. In return, when an intervention by the health and social care system is required, patients will be able to access those services more effectively and efficiently. That should lead to reductions in unnecessary hospital admissions and inappropriate attendance at A&Es.

The proposals set out in the review report 'Transforming Your Care' provide a framework within which service configuration can be progressed. The challenge for all of us, me as the Minister and you as Members of the Assembly, is to ensure that we reasonably and rigorously consider the proposals. We should also consider how they should be taken forward to create sustainable, effective and efficient delivery of health and social care that will improve the health and well-being of all the people of Northern Ireland. The Assembly has a duty to ensure that it provides the best health and social care services to our community — services that are safe and effective within the available resources. I appreciate that each of us will have considered the report from an individual constituency perspective. Although that is valuable and important, we should not let that unnecessarily impede us in delivering for all the citizens in Northern Ireland.

In total, 99 proposals were set out in 'Transforming Your Care' to support the development of a future model for integrated health and social care. The model correctly places patients and not institutions of health and social care at the centre, and it supports individuals in caring for themselves and making good health choices. The proposals represent a radical change to the way in which our health and social care services are delivered. That change is long overdue, and I am not alone in saying that. More than 3,000 people were engaged during the review, and the constant message that came from them was the need for change. We are fortunate in that we already have an integrated system of health and social care in Northern Ireland. The proposals are focused on enhancing and exploiting the opportunities that that can bring to patient-centric services, through the development of new models of integrated health and social care for the future. Quality and outcomes will be determining factors in shaping services. Individuals and not institutions will be at the centre, and individuals will be supported in caring for themselves and making good health choices.

For many patients, health and social care services will be increasingly accessible in their local area. To those accessing services, that may not seem different from the current situation. However, it is the way in which health professionals will work together to deliver those services that will be different. They will work together in a much more integrated way to plan and deliver consistently high-quality care for patients. There will be a changing role for general practices working in integrated care partnerships across Northern Ireland, and that will join together the full range of health and social care services in an area. Patients will deal with fewer professionals and will be at the centre of decision-making about their treatment.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

There will be a significant shift from the provision of services in hospitals to a provision closer to home in the community and/or GP surgery, where it is safe and effective to do so. Service providers will regard a patient's home as a hub, and they will be facilitated to ensure that people can be cared for at home, including at the end of life. Where specialist care is required, it will be available, and patients will be

discharged into the care of local services as soon as their health and care needs permit. An urgent care model will be implemented in every area to provide 24/7 access to urgent care services.

The voluntary and community sector will also have an important role to play in providing services and improving service delivery.

Very often, it is better placed and has a better understanding of the issues to deliver services to patients. The sector will need to be supported in doing that, and it will be very important that every effort be made to remove any barriers and blockages to its engagement.

2.00 pm

In line with the review's basic objective, it is proposed that hospitals work as an interdependent system, with each facility contributing to the provision of a total service to its population. Specifying a function for each hospital will be a bottom-up approach designed by local politicians and professional practitioners, taking account of the principles and criteria set out in the review. That will be an evolutionary process, and change will be taken forward on all sites over a five-year period.

A key aspect of that approach is that critical clinical staff will be employed to work in a hospital system. They will, therefore, be a resource for each population, working, as necessary, across hospital services and facilities. At present we have 10 acute hospitals in Northern Ireland, serving a population of 1·8 million. On the one hand, that could be envied, particularly in more urban areas of the UK with a similarly sized population, who are supported by perhaps only four large hospitals. On the other hand, it could be viewed as too much reliance being placed on our hospitals, with not enough services in the primary and community care settings.

In providing safe and sustainable services, it is implicit that our health and social care system be supported by acute hospital provision. However, that must be commensurate with the needs of patients and the types of services that are best provided in a hospital setting, and it must take account of those services that are best delivered in the community setting. It is in that strategic context that the review envisages that, by 2016-17, the model of major acute hospitals for Northern Ireland's more dispersed population will be reconfigured to a more appropriate scale between those two extremes.

I accept that that will mean change in the acute hospital sector, but the key test for any future service configuration has to be safety, sustainability and clinical resilience. In that respect, it will be important for local commissioning groups to develop specific proposals for acute hospitals, taking account also of the potential to provide services to patients from the Republic of Ireland where it is appropriate to do so and where it does not negatively impact on the services provided to patients in Northern Ireland.

I noted the comment in the review team's report that it is likely that we will be able to provide resilient, sustainable major acute services on only five to seven sites, assuming that the Belfast Trust hospitals are regarded as one network of major acute services. I cannot say at this stage whether that assertion is correct, because the test will be one of clinical sustainability and resilience. It will be on the basis of that test, which is not optional, that we will be able to determine the viability of any of the acute hospitals.

The future model for health and social care services will require the coming together of many strands in order for it to operate effectively. Workforce planning and development is, and will continue to be, a critical building block in ensuring that staff are appropriately trained and confident in their roles. Our workforce planning will need to focus on demand signals from the local health economy and from patients and clients rather than simply on supply-side inputs. It will need to be linked to service planning and underpinned by robust financial plans, making it more robust and linked to patient needs.

There is an opportunity for greater use of technology to support the delivery of services, and we are seeing that at present with the use of remote telemonitoring for patients with long-term conditions. There is an opportunity to build on that and exploit other opportunities where technology can support the delivery of effective health and social care.

We need to utilise resources more effectively, particularly in the light of the most significant financial challenge that the service has faced in many years. The proposed model means that there will be a shift of care from hospital settings to the community. Accordingly, there will be a shift in resources as funds are reallocated in line with service delivery. The key changes will include more care delivered in the home; changing care packages for people in nursing homes; increased roles for GPs; increased roles for pharmacies in medicines management and prevention; increased use of community and social care services to meet people's needs; and outreach of acute services into the community.

Taking account of those changes, the review concludes that by 2014-15 there will be a shift of funding of around 5%, or £83 million, from the hospital service budget to other services.

Mr Speaker: The Minister must conclude his remarks.

Mr Poots: There are some other issues, which I will deal with in my winding-up speech. I thank Members for the opportunity to have this debate, which I look forward to hearing.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to speak today on this crucial issue, which ultimately affects everyone in Northern Ireland and all those in the Chamber today.

There is no doubt that the recent health review chaired by John Compton represents a significant and fundamental development for our healthcare service. Given its significance, it is vital that we do not have a knee-jerk reaction or make rash decisions. The review involved extensive consultation with stakeholders, and, as a result, there has been a good buy-in to its proposals. Our current healthcare system is very much in need of not just change but improvement, and that is why this is an important opportunity for everyone involved in our health service to play a part in helping to deliver a modern, effective and efficient health service that is designed to meet the needs of the people of Northern Ireland today.

Improving outcomes and quality of care should remain the priority for the review, and I commend all those who have

been involved in the process to date. The Minister is also to be commended for his leadership on this important matter, and I am glad that he recognises that change is vital to improving and developing our health service as we move forward. The easy option would be to bury our heads in the sand and pretend that everything is fine and that change is not necessary. However, the reality is that our health service can and should be improved and must change or else, several years down the line, we will be pressed into making enforced, unplanned cuts that will have a devastating impact on our patients' needs.

Last week, I got a complaint from a lady in Holywood whose 82-year-old mother spent 22 hours on a trolley at the Ulster Hospital suffering from a leaking aneurysm before eventually being transferred to the Royal. That is not acceptable, and the health service should not deliver that type of service. There is a need for improvement when a situation such as that occurs, and that is why it is important that our hospitals be fit for purpose. In general, patients are well treated in our hospital service and in the health service, but there are big problems with getting into the system and being treated promptly at the time of need rather than lying on trolleys or waiting on an unending waiting list.

Staff play a crucial and most valuable role in the delivery of our healthcare service, and it is important that they be recognised and fully valued. The workforce in our health service can help to positively shape its direction. Engagement across all levels of society is vital, including with healthcare professionals and organisations right through to ordinary men and women across the country. GPs and pharmacists are examples of health professionals who have to play their part in helping to shape our health service and taking an increased role to reduce the workload of our overstretched A&E departments.

Health promotion should also remain a central theme of the review. It is a practical, cost-effective and lasting way of reducing the pressure on our health service while at the same time improving the health of our society. The review contains a wide range of measures designed to promote healthier living, and I welcome the Minister's commitment to tackling the fundamental issues that lie at the heart of improving healthcare. I support the proposal.

Ms Gildernew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to address the House today as Chair of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and I thank the Minister for providing the opportunity for debate. I apologise for missing most of the Minister's opening remarks.

The Committee is well aware that there is a need for change in how health and social care services are delivered here. Since the beginning of this mandate, we have met many organisations, both formally and informally, and they have told us that things need to be done differently if we are to see a real improvement in the health and well-being of our people. The Minister has told us that the review aims to deliver change in a way that will improve care.

Many aspects of the review have been welcomed by all, such as the focus on health promotion, on more services being provided in primary care settings and on caring for people in their own homes and communities. However, it is fair to say that there is also a concern that change may mean the loss of some services being provided in local hospitals. Similarly, there is a worry that, when services are removed from a hospital setting, there may be a time lag before they are provided in a primary care facility. The provisions need to be available in primary care before they are removed from the acute setting.

The Health Committee was briefed on the review by the Minister on 14 December, which was the day after the report was published. At that stage, we were able to discuss the review with the Minister only in its broad terms as people had not had sufficient time to examine the report in detail. However, the Committee will be holding a further evidence session with the Minister on the outworkings of the review on 1 February, and, thereafter, we intend to hear from him at six-weekly intervals to receive updates on the progress that is being made. As a Committee, we need to know how the review's 99 recommendations will translate into concrete actions and changes on the ground, and we will also need to know how many of those 99 recommendations will be accepted by the Minister, whether there are any that he is not accepting and his reasons for so doing. I say that from the point of view that I do not necessarily believe that all 99 recommendations should be implemented, and the Minister should take a careful look at all of them.

In the coming months, the Committee will also hear from those upon whom the review places a particular emphasis as far the delivery of services in a community or primary-care setting is concerned. To that end, the Committee will be hearing from the Royal College of General Practitioners and the British Medical Association in regard to the enhanced role that is envisaged for GPs in the review. We need to know how general practitioners feel about taking on additional responsibilities, how they will go about providing new services, what support they require to make that happen and how they can interface with local trusts' structures.

We will also be meeting the allied health professionals, who, according to the review, will have an enhanced role in health promotion and prevention. We will get their views on how best that should happen. We also wish to examine whether there they are sufficiently represented in the decision-making structures in the trusts, the board and the Department itself. The issue of self-referral for patients is also one that we will want to learn more about.

The review also sets out a greater role for pharmacists in delivering more services in the community, including health promotion and medicines management. As Members will be aware, a judicial review between the community pharmacists and the Department has been ongoing since June 2011. The judgement has recently been handed down, and, last week, the Committee held an evidence session with the Department on that matter. Obviously, much work needs to be done by the Department in working with Community Pharmacy to get the contract right so that the valuable skills that pharmacists possess can be best put to use in delivering the sorts of objectives that are set out in the review.

Finally, the Committee will keep a very close eye on how the Department intends to deliver the changes that are laid out in the review within its current budgetary envelope. We will want to ensure that, when a service moves from a hospital setting to a community setting, the attached budget follows suit. We must remember that the needs of patients are the

priority and that the changes that are set out in the review must ultimately mean better outcomes for them.

With your indulgence, a Cheann Comhairle, I will also say a few things as the party spokesperson on health. We heard from Gordon about the difficulty in A&E units and in hospital admissions, and we recognise that winter can be a difficult and challenging time for those who are tasked with delivering healthcare. The House is keeping a close eye on the delivery of healthcare not only at acute settings but across all of the areas of work. We have to —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Ms Gildernew: I ask that we continue to work closely with the Minister and the bodies that are charged with delivering healthcare to find a way that benefits all our people.

Mr McCallister: As colleagues have done, I welcome the debate and the fact that the Minister initiated it. It is important, because of the scale of the review, not only that we had a statement before the Christmas recess but that we have this debate. It is important that the Committee keeps an ongoing interest, because the review will set the agenda for reform of the health and social care system for many years to come.

2.15 pm

There are areas to be welcomed in the report. I take some issue with the Minister's assertion that this has nothing to do with money, as our experience here is that most things in the decision-making process have something to do with money. Given the debate that we had during the Budget process about health and the budget for it, and given the fact that we argued strongly that health was severely underfunded, I am not sure whether the assertion that this has nothing to do with money and that all would be well no matter what the budget accurately reflects where we are in the debate.

We welcomed parts of the Compton review. We welcome the fact that the review took place and that we got a focus — as we should always have — on the best outcomes for patients. Setting aside all other interests, any service that government provides should be outcomes-focused — health more than any other. What provides the best outcome for patients is what is most important.

Things such as moving spending from the acute setting into domiciliary care and supported living — supporting people in their home — are to be welcomed. However, do not underestimate the difficulties that the Minister will face in doing that. Look at the experiences in some Northern Ireland hospitals: in Antrim Area Hospital there are fairly constant breaches in waiting times. How will taking out further resources achieve target times? The Minister faces the challenge of getting £80 million out of the acute sector and moving it into social care. He also faces the challenge of finding the estimated £70 million over the three years that he feels are needed to implement the review. We are talking about large sums of money in the context of the already very tight budgetary position faced by the Department. Do not underestimate the challenges that face our health service and its budget. We have warned about those challenges constantly for over a year since the Department of Health budget settlement.

Mr Givan: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Does he recognise that the necessity for reform is a result of the previous Health Minister's failure to tackle the health service, and that reform is necessary if we want a health service that delivers free care at the point of need? However, the previous Minister failed ever to bring forward any reform to tackle those problems.

Mr Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute added to his time.

Mr McCallister: I am not sure where Mr Givan has been living for the past four or five years, but I assume that he was about Northern Ireland. He must have missed the changes in the whole structure of the health service — the reduction in the number of boards and the formation of five health and social care trusts and the ambulance trust. All those reforms took place, along with the setting up of the Public Health Agency, about which I have another question for the Minister. I know that doing away with the Public Health Agency is in the DUP manifesto. When Michael McGimpsey was setting it up under the Health and Social Care (Reform) Act (Northern Ireland) 2009, I argued strongly, as the Bill went through the Chamber, that we needed a dedicated Public Health Agency. I am not sure what the DUP position is — whether it will axe that agency or whether it has bought into the concept of public health. For the Lagan Valley Member to say that there was no reform is more of an indication that he arrived here only in 2010 and had not actually taken an interest in health before then. Perhaps, given that fact, I will overlook it this time and hope that he reads up on the issues before making such uneducated comments.

A huge reform programme has been going on in health and will always continue. The Department and hospital trusts will always be looking for extra savings, and we will always need to look for ways of doing things better.

Even the Compton review talks about that, saying that pathways of treatment and care change and improve constantly. We will have to respond to that, and it is something to be welcomed. It should be looked at and worked on so that we can deliver the best outcome that we can get for all our citizens and protect those hospitals and delivery care models in our local areas that we can.

Mr Durkan: I start by paying tribute to all those who were involved in the painstaking process that was the compilation and publication of the report, that is, the review team, the review panel, the staff and, most importantly, those who took part in the extensive public consultation process. The review has been acclaimed as a road map for the future, but, having now read and digested its contents, I am more inclined to describe it as a compass for the future. Although it gives us the direction of travel, it is not too hung up on the specific detail of how we are going to get there.

I must say to begin with that we are pleased with the destination, which basically crystallises a lot of the ideas that my party and others have espoused for some time now. Those are, namely, that there should be more focus on community-based and primary care services and, as a result, less dependence on secondary and clinical care services. In plain English, that will mean GPs and community pharmacies doing more work and a shift of emphasis, reliance and investment away from hospitals. Not only should that

make treatments more accessible to patients but it will take pressure off hospitals and their staff, enabling them to reduce waiting times and improve results. Of course, it should also realise substantial savings for the Department.

A similar transition is anticipated in the care of our senior citizens. The huge demographic shift that is occurring due to increased life expectancies is already placing a huge strain on the Department. More significantly, it is our opinion that the current model is failing users and carers alike. A greater emphasis on community care, that is, people being treated in their own homes, is accepted as the most desired and effective way forward.

More effort and investment is to be made in the areas of prevention and health promotion. That is also welcome. So much money is spent on the treatment of preventable conditions that it is logical to focus on their prevention. Obesity and illness related to smoking and drinking are prime examples, and I believe that any initiatives to tackle the roots of those are to be welcomed.

The review also nods — maybe not greatly, but it does nod — towards greater North/South co-operation. On an island the size of ours, it is vital that both Governments work together to maximise the impact of their ever-reducing budgets. Health is an area where results can be most beneficial. I acknowledge the open mind with which the Health Minister has embraced that concept, and I think that some of his ministerial colleagues could do well to learn from him. In my constituency, we will see the fruition of that co-operation with the establishment of the radiotherapy unit in Altnagelvin.

Throughout the review process, I consistently and persistently raised the need for money to be allocated to enable the transition from our current health and social care model to the one that we aspire to achieve. That money has now been identified, and Mr McCallister mentioned it earlier, but we need to make sure that, as well as being identified, it is made available. As stated earlier, we agree with the destination to which we are headed, but it is very important that we do not run out of petrol on the way. That would be disastrous, as it would create care vacuums and cause huge uncertainties for service users and care providers alike.

On the day that the report was published and the Minister made a statement on it, we were the only party, I believe, to raise concerns or ask questions about the implications of the review for staff. I acknowledge that the review was much needed, and, indeed, much welcomed by virtually all the staff in the health service that I have spoken to. However, I was unable on that day to receive assurances from the Health Minister regarding staff or staffing numbers.

It is very important that work be done in that regard as a matter of urgency. There should be negotiations with unions, and so forth, so that staff feel very much part of the review. I understand that it is a review of the health service as opposed to a review of health servants. However, without those caring and professional people, we would not have much of a health service.

Mr Speaker: As Question Time commences at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House take its ease until that time. The debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member called to speak will be Kieran McCarthy.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Broadband: Rural Areas

Mr Speaker: Question 11 has been withdrawn.

1. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of her statement on 6 January 2012, to outline the time frame for the delivery of high-speed broadband services in rural areas. *(AQO 1033/11-15)*

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): On 6 January 2012, I announced that Onwave UK Ltd had become the Department's appointed supplier of satellite broadband service across Northern Ireland. That contract ensures that people living in areas where broadband cannot be accessed via telephone lines can continue to access broadband services using satellite technology. The high specification service available from Onwave offers download speeds of between six and 10 megabits per second, and has been available from the date of contract announcement. The contract complements the initiatives that my Department has already taken forward to deliver high-speed broadband services into rural areas, including the fibre-to-the-cabinet roll-out under the next generation broadband project and the fixed wireless networks deployed under the Northern Ireland broadband fund.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for her answer and I welcome the initiative that she outlined on 6 January. Is the Minister confident that Northern Ireland will eventually enjoy 100% broadband access due to the satellite Onwave initiative? Can she give an assurance that places such as Tyrone and Fermanagh will have an affordable and dependable broadband service?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. We have always striven to give 100% accessibility. Part of the difficulty is that a lot of our constituents believe that they should be able to access fixed-line broadband regardless of where they live, and they see the other mechanisms for the delivery of broadband as being secondary or not as good. I find that a bit strange sometimes, because no one in Northern Ireland says that their Sky television signal is worse than their terrestrial TV signal.

However, we have to deal with those perceptions. We have a new contract which will deliver satellite broadband to those areas that we cannot reach by fixed line. We have fixed-line broadband, and the amount of investment that has gone into it has been quite large when you look at other regions of the UK and these islands. We have wireless broadband connections as well. That has come about through the broadband fund, which looks at new technology to try to assist constituents who are unable to get the fixed line. We are trying our best to look at all the new technologies, but one of the biggest challenges in moving forward — and I have said it many times in the House — is to make sure that we get the new mobile coverage right, and we are working strenuously on that. There is still a lot to do in the

telecoms section, but it is certainly one on which I keep a very close eye.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answer. Minister, in your statement of 6 January, you talked about an increase in cost with the new services. Will you give the House further information on those increases in costs to customers?

Mrs Foster: There is an increase in cost. Rather than have customers find out about it when they contact Onwave, I thought it only right that it was flagged up to those customers at that time. I do not have the increases with me, but I am content to write to the Member and place a copy of the letter in the Library. It is more expensive; however, a better service will be delivered and, because of that, we felt that this was the right appointment to make at the time. As the Member knows, there have been previous appointments in relation to satellite provision: BT and then Avanti Communications were appointed. We listened to the concerns raised about those various contracts, and we believe that Onwave will be able to deliver a good service. However, we felt it only right to point out that it is a more expensive service.

Mr Buchanan: I commend the Minister and the Department for all the work that they are doing on broadband in rural areas. Can the Minister inform the House how other methods of broadband delivery have been developing —

Mr Speaker: Will the Member bring the microphone a wee bit closer?

Mr Buchanan: I am sorry. Will the Minister inform the House how other methods of broadband delivery have been developing, whether satellite, 3G or 4G networks?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. Indeed, we recognise that there are many areas of Northern Ireland which are of such a rural nature that we need to try to supplement the fixed-line broadband. We have been doing that through the broadband fund, for instance, of which there have been six calls to date, or through appointing a satellite provider, as we have been doing for some time.

The Member is right to point out the issue in relation to 3G and 4G coverage. It is important that we continue to lobby Ofcom and the central Government Department in Whitehall to stress to them that we need regional targets for coverage for our mobile phone operators. I also hope to have a meeting in the near future with the four largest mobile phone operators to help them to see why there is a need to bring more coverage to Northern Ireland and the benefits that there will be for them, as well as for many of our constituents.

Mr Beggs: As well as the services that the Minister has talked about, I understand that mobile broadband is also available specifically for mobile phone users. Will the Minister advise how she will ensure that that be fully examined so that that service, which is cost-comparable with fixed lines, is fully examined in clusters, rather than people having to tie up to satellite systems?

Mrs Foster: That is precisely what I was talking about in my last answer with regard to 3G and 4G coverage; we very much see the future of technology moving in that direction. Many people do not have a fixed modem; they work off their iPads or mobile handheld devices. Therefore, there is a need for us to have increased coverage. The Member will know from looking at the statistics for his area that there is a significant fall-off in the Larne area in relation to the percentage of no reliable signal. That is something that we should be concerned about. It is something that we need to see changing, and it will come about by lobbying, not only by me, but by other Members and through engagement with the Whitehall Department.

Titanic Centenary

2. **Ms J McCann** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the attention and resources focused by her Department on marking the centenary of the sinking of the Titanic. *(AQO 1034/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: As 2012 marks the centenary of Titanic's maiden voyage and tragic sinking, it provides a once in a lifetime opportunity for us. The story of Titanic is known worldwide, and now is our time to firmly place Belfast as the home of Titanic. A two-week festival will mark the opening of Titanic Belfast on 31 March. This is an amazing opportunity for us all in Belfast and, indeed, across Northern Ireland; I trust we will grasp it.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answer. Perhaps the Minister has focused too much attention and resources into the project. Will she be spreading them across the rest of the city?

Mrs Foster: I do not accept that. Titanic is a worldwide brand. It will help not only east Belfast and the rest of Belfast, but the entirety of the Northern Ireland tourist trade. It is wrong to say that we are focusing solely on Titanic, although I will readily say that it is a key plank of what we are doing in 2012. We were planning for seven international events for this year, but that is up to eight with the arrival of golf's Irish Open at the end of June in Royal Portrush. As well as Titanic Belfast, we have the Peace One Day concert in Londonderry, the Land of Giants in Belfast, the Clipper Maritime Homecoming Festival in Londonderry, the Peace Camp, Flags by Hans Peter Kuhn at the Giant's Causeway and, of course, the fiftieth Ulster Bank Belfast Festival at Queen's. All of those are international events, and all of them will bring people not only to east Belfast, but to the whole of Northern Ireland. It is a key element to all of this that every citizen in Northern Ireland grasps the opportunity for 2012.

Some very good work in relation to the community engagement programme across the city has been carried out by Belfast City Council. It has trained 62 Titanic ambassadors from across the city to engage and spread knowledge. I have been contacted by people from the Member's constituency who want to get involved in the Titanic celebrations and centenary, because they know that it is a global brand and that people will come to the city, and they very much want to be a part of that.

Mr A Maginness: I agree with the Minister in relation to the importance of the Titanic development in the Titanic Quarter, and I wish it well; I hope it will be successful. I believe it will be a tremendous year for Northern Ireland tourism. There has been public ventilation about European funding. Will the Minister reassure the House that there has been an

application for European funding, and will she reassure the House that, if that funding is not forthcoming, it will not in any way impede the development of this wonderful building and wonderful asset for the tourist industry in Northern Ireland?

Mrs Foster: Yes, I am content to confirm that that is the case. If the EU does not accept the grant application in respect of Titanic, and we have no reason to believe that it will not, given the advice that we have been given by our own legal advisers, other projects can be put forward to the European Union instead. The financing of the Titanic signature project is not at risk. I get very frustrated when I listen to some commentators who try to play that up instead of playing up the importance of it to our tourism industry. There is negativity surrounding the Audit Office report, and, if you look at the detail of the report, you will see that it is talking about visitors coming to the Titanic signature project on the same level as those who visit Belfast Zoo. If the Titanic signature project cannot attain the same amount of visitors as Belfast Zoo, we should not be doing the Titanic signature project. We must raise our game, start to have some confidence in ourselves and sell the city of Belfast across the world as a place for visitors to come to and have a tremendous experience. However, the more we talk ourselves down, the more likely it is that that will not happen. I will not take this anymore. I am simply frustrated to the end of the earth with the BBC, in particular, for talking down the tourist industry in this country. It is about time that every Member of the House stood up and said, "Thus far and no further".

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Douglas: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for kindly — *[Interruption.]* Any chance here?

I thank the Minister for her statement. What are the anticipated benefits for the whole of Northern Ireland for this amazing and iconic wow-factor building opening in April and the other associated centenary events? And the Causeway. *[Laughter.]*

Mrs Foster: We are now going to have every Member from every constituency standing up. However, I am happy to take all those.

We now have eight international events spread across Northern Ireland. As well as that, we have what the Tourist Board calls our tier 2 events. The tourism events fund has had its adjudication in respect of the national tourism events fund, and it received 61 applications for financial assistance. There is plenty of excitement in the industry about 2012. The Tourist Board is communicating all the decisions to the events organisers and letters of offer are being issued in respect of the tier 2 events. I think that 2012 will be a fabulous year for international and national events.

Mrs Cochrane: Given that the Titanic brand is often better known than Northern Ireland itself, and we have "Titanoraks" all round the world, has the Minister had any communications with those responsible for marketing the Olympics in GB to ensure that we maximise the opportunity for those visiting London to add a Northern Ireland visit as a bolt-on to their trip?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for her question. It is a very good point and something that we have been developing with our colleagues in VisitBritain. During the break, Members may have seen that the tourism Minister on the mainland announced some very big advertisements relating to making it a great 2012 and holidaying at home. As well as England, each of the UK regions will be featured in separate adverts around the UK, and the Northern Ireland advert will feature nothing less than the Giant's Causeway as an iconic attraction.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mrs Foster: That is for the GB market. Tourism Ireland is working very hard with VisitBritain and the Olympic organisers to get Northern Ireland on itineraries for those who travel far to the Olympics. Therefore, those who come from Australia and elsewhere to the UK will spend some time at the Olympics and, no doubt, they will want to get out around the regions as well. That being the case, we want to see Northern Ireland very firmly on the map for those itineraries.

2.45 pm

Golf: Irish Open

3. **Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given the announcement that the Irish Open golf competition will be held in Portrush, what plans are in place to ensure that it benefits all of Northern Ireland.
(AQO 1035/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Hosting the Irish Open in June will be an opportunity for the whole of Northern Ireland to shine. Such a high-profile event provides the opportunity to change global perceptions of Northern Ireland and boost tourism for the whole country. With the potential for up to 25,000 visitors on each of the four days, the impact of the event will be felt not only on the north coast but throughout all of Northern Ireland. The Irish Open will be integrated into the NI 2012 marketing activity and included in all the key communications. It will be a high-profile event that will showcase all of Northern Ireland.

Mr Frew: We will be keen to get as many visitors as possible to Northern Ireland, not only to see the golf action but to sample the beautiful north coast, where the Giant's Causeway, which is in my constituency, is.

There is also the potential for bed spaces. We are such a small country, but we need to think big. Is there a co-ordinated plan to help our main towns of Ballymoney, Ballymena, Ballycastle and Coleraine, which are near Portrush, to maximise bed spaces?

Mrs Foster: I do not think that you got all the towns in North Antrim into that question.

This has had a huge impact already. I was up in the Maiden City last week and was told by hoteliers there that they have been inundated with people who want to stay in that city for the Irish Open. That gives you an indication of how people are viewing this. They are looking at the Irish Open as an opportunity to come up to Northern Ireland, and we should all be very pleased about that. A partnership approach will be taken to this event. We are working with Coleraine Borough Council, Royal Portrush Golf Club and across government. The Department for Regional Development and Translink will have a critical role to play in the logistics of the Irish Open. We do hope that we can top the numbers in

Killarney last year and bring more and more visitors to Royal Portrush.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I echo some of the sentiments of the previous questioner. Ballycastle is only a stone's throw from where the Irish Open will be held. There is now an added impetus to provide hotel provision there. Does the Minister agree with that statement and can she provide us with an update on where things stand on hotel provision in Ballycastle?

Mrs Foster: I think that that is question 12 on the list. However, the development of four-star and five-star hotels in the region is, of course, documented as a strategic action in the 'Causeway Coast and Glens Tourism Masterplan' for 2004-2013. The Tourist Board supports that. I have met the Member, along with some hotel providers, and he will know that it is my desire to see a hotel of that standing in the Ballycastle area. That is something that is missing from the area and something that I hope will happen in the near future. Investment in the hotel accommodation sector will, of course, require the private sector to take a lead. However, as he knows, the sector can apply to Invest Northern Ireland for support.

Mr McClarty: I extend my congratulations to the Minister and all those involved in securing this prestigious tournament for the north coast. It is not surprising that the Giant's Causeway is mentioned so often here, since it forms part of the premier tourist area of Northern Ireland. Has the Minister or those who were successful in securing the Irish Open any plans to secure the British Open for the same golf course?

Mrs Foster: I have made no secret of the fact that it is my great hope and desire to see "The" Open come to Royal Portrush. I said last July when I visited Royal Portrush after the success of Darren Clarke that we needed to hold another event — an intermediate event, if you like — before we could go for the Open. I very much think that what happens with the Irish Open will have a bearing on whether we are seen by the Royal and Ancient Golf Club as appropriate to host the Open. I think that we will be, and I very much look forward to the day when we have one of our own golfing champions win the Open Championship at Royal Portrush.

Broadband: Rural Areas

4. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the actions her Department has taken to address poor broadband provision in rural areas. *(AQO 1036/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: Over the past eight years, my Department has taken forward a number of initiatives that have been either entirely or substantially aimed at increasing access to and quality of broadband services in rural areas. Those include the £9·23 million local broadband access contract, which provided access to entry-level broadband services to all premises across Northern Ireland; the £19·8 million next generation broadband services contract, which has led to an investment of £51 million in the roll-out of the highest level of fibre-to-the-cabinet technology in the UK; the £1·9 million Northern Ireland broadband fund, which has seen significant deployment of high-speed fixed wireless broadband services; and the contracts with Avanti Communications Plc and now with Onwave Ltd, through which high-specification satellite broadband services have been made available region-wide.

Mr Craig: I thank the Minister for outlining that. I know the work that you have put into the wireless broadband option, and I thank you and your Department for that.

Has the Minister had any talks with landline companies to come up with a strategy to extend landline broadband options deeper into rural communities? Unfortunately, in today's market, unless it is one of the mobile phone operators or landline companies, there is no competition among other providers.

Mrs Foster: One reason why we have put so much government subvention into the alternatives to landline broadband is the fact that there is no competition there. However, that does not take away from the fact that there is a good alternative to the landline option, and I know that the Member has constituents who are very concerned because they cannot access the landline. However, we have to realise that, in very rural areas of Northern Ireland, there comes a point when the cost of putting the landline into the ground becomes disproportionate and we must find other ways, whether they are through fixed wireless, satellite or, indeed, the new mobile technologies. I will continue to work with Members to find solutions for their constituents, but I urge them to try to get their constituents to understand that there are more ways to access broadband than simply through a fixed-line service.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her update on rural broadband provision. She will know that previous contracts that her Department has awarded to satellite broadband providers have, through no fault of her Department, failed to set the world alight. What trials were carried out prior to the award of the most recent contract to Onwave?

Mrs Foster: I do not believe that any trials have been carried out, although I stand to be corrected by officials. I am quite happy to let the Member see the process that we went through to award the contract to Onwave Ltd. My advice is that it is a step up in respect of the service that will be given to constituents. Therefore, I will write to the Member with the details, and, after he has looked at that, he can judge whether he wants to ask further questions.

Mr Nesbitt: Given the amount of public funding that is going into this, what steps is the Minister taking to ensure that landline and mobile roll-out is based purely on assessed economic need?

Mrs Foster: The key for us and our Programme for Government target is to deliver to 85% of businesses. That was always the key target, and then the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development rolled in behind us with its target to deliver more to its farming and rural communities, and, as a result, more money was put in for that.

There will, of course, always be value-for-money considerations in relation to these issues, and I mentioned them when I answered the question asked by my colleague Mr Craig. However, we feel that our subvention is needed for broadband services because people now expect to be able to access broadband in the same way that they access electricity. It is a very important part of our everyday lives, so our

subvention has proved to be value for money. However, we need to find new and better ways to deliver the services.

Mr Speaker: Question 5 has just been withdrawn.

Economic Strategy

6. **Ms Ritchie** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when the economic strategy will be implemented. *(AQO 1038/11-15)*

Mrs Foster: The draft economic strategy, which was published in November alongside the draft Programme for Government and draft investment strategy, sets out how the Executive intend to support the growth of a prosperous local economy to 2030. The draft strategy and supporting comprehensive action plan identify the actions that will be implemented during the current Budget period. The actions are designed to support the rebalancing of the local economy over the longer term and the rebuilding of the local labour market in the aftermath of the recession.

Ms Ritchie: I thank the Minister for her answer. Given the inability of Invest NI fully to utilise its resources for investment purposes, how does the Minister intend to address the issues of inequity and inequality in the location of industry to ensure that the south-east of Northern Ireland is given its full opportunity in terms of visits by potential investors and the location of manufacturing and business opportunities?

Mrs Foster: Invest Northern Ireland's hand-back was grossly misrepresented by no less than the Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment on Radio Ulster before — that is the important word — the Committee had an opportunity to discuss the contents of the paper. I was so disappointed, for a number of reasons. When the Committee Chairperson goes on the radio before a paper has gone in front of the Committee, neither the Minister nor the chief executive of Invest Northern Ireland can comment because protocol dictates that the paper should be discussed by officials with the Committee members.

Had I been able to discuss the matter on the radio, I would have said that it had been stated earlier in the year that there were difficulties with the budget. It was signalled during the October monitoring round that there could be further impact on investment decisions. Over the past three months, international conditions have, if anything, worsened. Against that backdrop, a number of companies have delayed implementing plans. We have made cost savings — I remind the House that that is meant to be a good thing — and generated £1·5 million in additional receipts for reallocation by the Executive. That is money that was not allocated to Invest Northern Ireland; it was money made by Invest Northern Ireland and then put back into the centre. That has been a good thing as well. Invest Northern Ireland and the Department agreed that with the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Simple sound bites cannot give the totality of a paper in front of the Committee. That paper stated that £5·6 million should be released for projects that will proceed. However, where there is a risk that they may happen this year or very early next year, I have to give that money back in this year. The Budget's financial rules mean that I cannot carry it over into the following year. That is disappointing for the chief executive of Invest Northern Ireland and me, but there it is. I have taken some time to explain that because, unfortunately, I was not able to explain it on Thursday when the Committee Chairperson spoke on radio about the matter.

Mr I McCrea: Will the Minister detail how important the jobs fund and the Boosting Business programme are in helping to rebuild the local labour market?

Mrs Foster: The Boosting Business initiative has been roundly welcomed across the business community. A lot of people have been able to partake in our Focus on Finance seminars, which are a critical part of it, and to avail themselves of the jobs fund. We are seeing a considerable take-up of the jobs fund, with 60 projects now in the pipeline. We have been looking proactively at how we can help those people who need it at this time. Cash flow and confidence remain the two issues that I keep coming up against time and again. We need to talk about confidence. A lot of people are talking down the economy of Northern Ireland. When I was out and about with some retailers last week, they said that the one big problem for them was the lack of confidence. People do not want to spend because they are afraid that they may need the money later.

Confidence remains a huge issue for our economy, and I hope that we can start to deal with realities and not perceptions about that in the coming months.

3.00 pm

Environment

Mr Speaker: Questions 3 and 6 have been withdrawn.

Coastal Erosion: Whitehead

1. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the effects on the environment of the coastal erosion at Quarry Cottages, Whitehead, Carrickfergus. *(AQO 1048/11-15)*

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I thank the Member for his question. I know those cottages because I did not live very far from them and I worked in that area. I am also aware of the localised erosion that impacts on the small number of local residents who use the pathway. At this stage, my advice is that there are no significant environmental consequences, but I would like to hear more from representatives of the area.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for his answer. The question was tabled to highlight the predicament and, perhaps, frustration of residents where the vital link to the town of Whitehead is now down to around 15 in of a path and in a dangerous state. I was wondering whether the Department could help by maybe at least getting some stakeholders together to try to come to a resolution. I know that it is probably a cross-departmental issue, but, since it began with coastal erosion, I was hoping that the Department of the Environment would take a lead.

Mr Attwood: It would be difficult for me to take a lead on that matter because it does not technically fall to my Department. I will, though, bring it to the attention of other

Ministers and Translink in particular. Given that there is a railway line along the Antrim coast from Carrickfergus to Whitehead and beyond and given the need to maintain that, which is the single biggest asset of the coastline in that area, I will bring the matter to Translink's attention to make sure that it is aware of the erosion and to determine what remedies, if any, it thinks appropriate.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat. What are the Minister's thoughts about the materials used for coastal defences? Some experts prefer wooden groynes and others rock armour.

Mr Attwood: I am not a scientist and do not pretend to be one. I am a politician and do pretend to be one. *[Laughter.]*

Mr McCartney: You are not very good at it.

Mr Attwood: Thank you, Raymond — there is more to come. *[Laughter.]* Therefore, in all these matters, I defer to best science. If best science prefers A over B for coastal defences, that is what I concur with, subject to one caveat, namely that, at all times, we should deploy and use materials that will cause the least damage to the environment and are most conducive to protecting the environment and the appearance of the area. Subject to that caveat, I rely on science.

Mr Beggs: The Minister said that he would bring the matter to the attention of Translink. In doing so, will he draw its attention to the fact that, if a path were to follow the railway line and Translink realigned its fence, it may be possible to protect the coastal route with minimal cost, minimal impact on the environment and minimal requirement for public funds?

Mr Attwood: Local representatives will know the area better than I and will know what remedies may be appropriate. I will include a copy of the Hansard report in correspondence to any Minister, Translink or any other third-party organisation where it may be the case that those who have primary responsibility may or may not be minded to adopt that particular recommendation.

Local Government: Double-jobbing

2. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of the Environment what action he intends to take to prevent councillors from being Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly at the same time. *(AQO 1049/11-15)*

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question and remind the House that it is nearly a year since it voted against Dawn Purvis's proposal for a ban on double-jobbing in respect of those who were councillors and MLAs. That was a missed opportunity but is not one that we should miss again.

The consultation on my proposal to reduce the allowances for MLAs who remain as councillors concluded on 16 December. I intend to bring that forward in the very near future. As Members will be aware, the Executive, although they did not endorse my best advice in respect of a number of RPA matters, endorsed my recommendation in November that there should be an explicit ban on double-jobbing by MLAs and councillors in forthcoming local government legislation. I remind people that 33 Members of the House are still councillors.

Mr McNarry: Name them.

Mr Attwood: If the Member wants to name them, he should look to his right.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member must be allowed to continue.

Mr A Maginness: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank the Minister for his reply, with which I agree completely. I encourage him, before the RPA process ends, to legislate or deal with that matter effectively so that the question of double-jobbing in councils and the Assembly will be dealt with effectively.

Mr Attwood: I give that reassurance. The Executive have endorsed the principle. I trust that they will endorse the legislative words when those eventually come to them for approval before the Bill comes to the House. If the Executive flip-flop on that, they will ignore the consultation responses. There were only 11 responses. Nobody supported a proposal that allowances continue at the current level for MLAs who are also councillors: nobody endorsed that proposition. That sends a strong message about the mind of the public when it comes to the issue of double-jobbing in due course.

Mr Campbell: I believe that virtually every Member of the House endorses what the Minister has said about the move to limit allowances for councillors who are also MLAs. However, does he accept the fact, rather than the perception, that among many single-mandate representatives, whether they are councillors or MLAs, there is a level of incompetence, inadequacy or of simply not doing their job? He should examine more closely the level of under-representation of some single-mandate representatives with respect to questions, presence in the House, activity and actions. Although voters will, obviously, have the final say, will he also look at that?

Mr Attwood: Voters have the final say. We all have to be judged, sometimes unwillingly, by the democratic mandate. There should be more accountability regarding not just public policy and government but Members too. Various interventions through new media put the spotlight, over and above what happens in the House, on the content and conduct of Members' work. However, we need to be careful. There are many ways to judge a public representative. It could come down to the single matter of how many questions someone tables. I know the quality of some of the questions tabled; Mr Campbell will be aware of that too. Although it is the democratic right of MLAs, I sometimes wonder about the true intention, thinking and ambition behind them.

I want to go further. I want to create a regime in the North that models democratic expression differently from any other part of these islands. That is why, at present, I have officials looking at some sort of ban on election posters in certain places during elections. That is why I have officials looking at the law and the desirability of putting into law a requirement for a minimum quota for women's participation in elections, so that, when it comes to the local government reorganisation, there is a minimum threshold for the number of female candidates who run for election for all parties that get state funding, which all parties in the House do in one way or another.

Mr Allister: Can I press the Minister further to be more precise about cutting off the funding stream? Undoubtedly, that is the action that will deal with the issue. Many Members of the House draw down an extra £10,000 as councillors, but it does not end there. They also draw down money as Chairpersons or as members of outside bodies, and many inflate their salary way beyond another 50% of their already generous salary. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps the Members who are intervening have most to account for.

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to continue.

Mr Allister: When can we expect that tap to be turned off to bring an end to this matter?

Mr Attwood: I have both sympathy and a lack of sympathy with the Member's remarks. Local representatives, Mr McAllister — *[Laughter.]* A long time before you chose to join our ranks, local representatives served the people of the North of Ireland with very limited income, at some risk and, very often, with a degree of hostility across constituencies in the North. I value the service of local councillors going back over the past 20, 30 and 40 years. That is why the Chamber was right to put into law an opportunity for councillors to get severance in the event of local government reorganisation. I will have more to say on that in the near future. Let us not demean or run down the public service of hundreds of people in very difficult circumstances for very little income over many years.

Circumstances may have changed in order to bring about a fairer regime when it comes to councillors. However, what I am saying is that, when it comes to the issue of councillors being MLAs, that principle is not right. Although, legally, I cannot ban it, I will do something in respect of allowances. I anticipate that the regime will be in place before the summer.

Mr Boylan: Given the public perception and the potential conflict of interest that may be created between this authority and local authorities, will the Minister clearly outline when he proposes to introduce proper legislation that will stop the practice of double-jobbing once and for all? Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Attwood: I refer to my previous answers and to the decision of the Member's ministerial colleagues to endorse a recommendation from me that, if local government reorganisation happens in 2015, there will be a ban on double-jobbing, subject to the will of the Assembly. All parties endorsed that principle in the paper that I submitted to the Executive in November, and I trust that every November hereafter, up to the passage of the Bill that will give expression to that principle, they will endorse that recommendation.

Mr Kinahan: As the Minister knows, I fully agree with him. As the question that I wanted to ask about conflicts of interest has just been answered, I will go for a simpler question. Has he found my colleague Mike Nesbitt's research on election posters and whether we can ban them useful?

Mr Attwood: I was prompted by Members to look at election posters. As a consequence, last year, I wrote to all registered political parties in Northern Ireland to ask for their views about the display of election posters because we have control over the matter. I welcome the responses, although there were not many, and I welcome those who contributed in other ways, including Mr Nesbitt. I am working to the principle of doing something about election posters and restrictions on display.

Election posters are part of democratic expression and good practice. Therefore, I will not bring forward any recommendation to ban them, but I will bring forward recommendations that may see the exclusion of posters in certain places in order to show due respect to other public institutions such as churches and schools and in and around polling stations in order to create as full, free and fair an election as possible.

Mr Speaker: Question 3 has been withdrawn and has been transferred to DRD for written answer.

3.15 pm

National Parks

4. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister of the Environment for an overview of the responses to the consultation on the proposals to introduce enabling legislation for the creation of national parks. *(AQO 1051/11-15)*

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. The specific answer is that there were 69 responses. If you were to filter out the responses, you would see that they had two themes: first, that, in bringing forward proposals for national parks, we were not going far enough to protect the environment; and, secondly, that we would impose heavy burdens on the management of lands in national parks in a way that was hostile to the interests of those who work and live there. Therefore, although there was a very substantial response — 69 responses — those were the broad themes.

As I have made clear before, I am a firm advocate of the concept of national parks being made in the image of the North of Ireland and different from the model of national parks in other parts of these islands. I am firmly convinced about that, and I believe that there are economic and other opportunities in bringing forward the proposals. That is why, as I speak and until the beginning of February, officials will meet with various organisations to give them a sense of where we are. I will bring forward firm proposals in this area in the near future.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank the Minister for his answer. Does the Minister agree with me that the Department should reassure rural communities about the benefits of national parks? What efforts has the Department made to undertake that work?

Mr Attwood: I agree with the principle that has been outlined. When the concept of a national park was proposed previously for the Mournes, a vigorous campaign was opposed to the principle, never mind the practice, of national parks. People should learn from that. We need to create as great a consensus as possible across the range of interests, including the farming interest, in the event that a national park may be designated for one area or another. That is why we are having the consultations quietly over the next four or five weeks. We are informing people of a direction of travel before I make further announcements in February. I have met stakeholders, including the UFU, to reassure them that the model that we will develop will

maximise the protection of the environment, respect the interests of local people, including farmers, and, at the same time, positively exploit national parks.

Earlier in Question Time, Arlene Foster outlined the potential of the Irish Open and the British Open coming to Royal Portrush or to another golf course in the North of Ireland. The Titanic signature project opens this year, Tourism Ireland is holding an event in London this week to promote all the opportunities in the North during 2012 and we have the City of Culture in 2013. All those demonstrate that we can use our history and our built and natural heritage to improve our quality and character of life and to attract tourism and increase tourist spend. In my view, the same principle governs national parks.

Mr S Anderson: Will the Minister outline to what extent he and his Department have liaised with their colleagues in England and Wales to ascertain the likely environmental and economic benefits of national parks?

Mr Attwood: As the Member knows and as the proposal for national parks in the North reminds us, every other jurisdiction in these islands has national parks. They may vary in their character, but every other part of these islands has one or more national parks. Going way back, even before restoration, there was liaison with other jurisdictions and the national parks in those jurisdictions to identify best practice and the model that they deployed. All that will inform how I take forward the proposal in both the legislation and the identification of potential candidates for designation.

If I can get the endorsement of the Assembly and the Executive, I do not want to see a situation where it takes two years to pass a law only for us to take two more years as we identify areas that may be designated as national parks. I want to create certainty in law and in implementation. We will have a parallel process of law on one hand and implementation on the other, so that, on the far side of national parks legislation, we can move as quickly as possible to designation.

I have also said to officials that we should grab that moment if we come to it. We should do so not by designating one area for a national park but by designating at least two areas of Northern Ireland as national parks to demonstrate, in a very dramatic and public fashion, that our built and natural heritage is of such a scale and character that we have a lot to say and can say it more than once.

Mrs McKevitt: I will expand on the Minister's previous reply and ask him to outline what areas of Northern Ireland his Department has designated as potential national parks. When will he announce his candidates for selection?

Mr Attwood: I remind the House that, in October, I appointed a small panel of people to identify possible areas for designation. Their recommendations are with me. I will announce shortly the three areas that they identified as being most likely to be suitable for designation. There might be some surprises in that. *[Interruption.]* Whatever about the three areas, I will not close my mind to Black Mountain. Nor should government close its mind to the possibility that, whatever the three recommended areas may be, there may be a late run from other areas seeking designation as a national park. Ensuring that all those who may have the will and the way to achieve designation have the opportunity so to do is one of the reasons why, when the time comes, I will be minded to argue for designation of more than one area.

Ms Lo: I very much welcome the Minister's positive responses so far on the proposal for a national park. He mentioned implementing it as soon as possible. Can he give us a definite timeline for implementing the legislation?

Mr Attwood: Yes. Subject to Executive agreement, I hope to have legislation before the House as early as autumn 2012. Thereafter, the legislation will take 18 months to proceed, and it will then receive Royal Assent. As I said, in parallel with that, there will be a process to implement what the legislation might eventually say, with the intention of designating national parks as quickly as is reasonable after the passage of the Bill.

Planning Applications: Wind Turbines

5. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of the Environment, in view of the need to meet renewable energy targets by 2020, for his assessment of the effectiveness of the planning application process in relation to applications for wind turbines that were received in 2011. *(AQO 1052/11-15)*

Mr Attwood: I welcome the stream of questions in today's Question Time that address issues on renewables. As I said before and as Alex Salmond, the Scottish independence leader, said on Friday in Dublin, renewables continue to be areas of work that all the Administrations of these islands need to interrogate and move forward on positively, given the scale of opportunity that they present.

I confirm that 96% of all applications for wind farms have been approved. Eighty-three per cent of individual applications for wind turbines, which are the subject of Mr Dunne's question, were approved in the 2010-11 business year as opposed to 2011. In the two quarters for which we have figures in 2011-12, 84% of individual wind turbine applications were approved. So, there are good success rates, although I think that we should push the turnaround time more and, arguably, seek higher approval rates, subject to the caveat that I have tasked officials to interrogate the raw data around the approvals to ascertain that the figures that I am giving stand up to rigorous scrutiny.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his answer so far. When dealing with planning applications, does his Department give equal weight to the operating efficiency and economic benefit against the visual impact of wind turbines?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. There is planning policy that informs planning decisions on wind turbines and wind farms, and certain factors are taken into account, including environmental factors, the visual impact and the economic benefit of achieving our renewable target, which is that, by 2020, 40% of our energy should come from renewable sources. In my view, that target should be pushed even further, as should the target of a 25% reduction in our carbon emissions by 2025 compared with those of 1990. All those factors are brought into account. Although there have been some, I have not come across many examples where, following approval of a wind farm or wind turbine, local opposition has been sustained in the event of operational experience.

Mr McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. There have been examples of inconsistency in the application of the policy. Does the Minister recognise the benefit of issuing revised guidelines to ensure that the

planners not only apply rigorous objectivity but deal with applications in the most expeditious fashion?

Mr Attwood: I agree with the broad thrust of the question. There has been some experience, including up in the north-west, of the appearance, if not the substance, of inconsistent application. That was identified during the summer of last year, and, as a consequence and starting up in the north-west, we rolled out training on planning office management of individual wind turbine applications to ensure consistency in the application of current policy across the North of Ireland in every wind turbine application. That training is coming to a conclusion.

Going further, we are looking at taking up one of the points that you raised and amending the advice to planning officers about, for example, the location of wind turbines in peatland areas. There should be a degree more flexibility, borrowing perhaps from the Scottish model, on the establishment of turbines in peatland areas. That work is part of the work being taken forward by an ad hoc group of renewable industry representatives that I established to work with the Department to identify where we can, consistent with good environmental and planning standards, ensure that the system is flexible enough to accommodate what, I believe, is a growth opportunity and economic asset going forward. That is why, this week, officials are coming in to look at how we manage anaerobic digester applications, of which there are now 70 in the system. A total of 21 have been managed already, most of which got approval, and it is clear that, as with tidal power, we should exploit that opportunity going forward. However, we need to ensure that we have the right capacity, the right training and the right numbers in the planning system to maximise the opportunity.

Mr Agnew: The Minister has mentioned the high approval rate, and he is right to do so. However, does he agree that, if we are to maximise the economic and environmental opportunities of wind energy, we need to improve the efficiency of the planning process? The long time taken to get planning approval may put off many potential investors.

3.30 pm

Mr Attwood: There has been good experience with the timelines for wind farms and wind turbines. In recent times, there has been some decline in the management of individual wind turbine applications, but, in general, I agree with your assertion. We need to have a planning system that is open for business, is fit for purpose and turns around those opportunities as quickly as possible, not least because of the scale of moneys that will be invested both by the individual and the corporate in taking forward applications. If we are to meet our 40% renewables target by 2020, we need to ensure that those wind turbines and wind farms get built. We can have planning approvals, but if applications do not mature into actual construction because of delays or doubts over the economic environment, we will not reach our target of 40% by 2020. Alternatively, we will reduce our economic opportunities or let down the green agenda.

Executive Committee Business

Health and Social Care Review

Debate resumed on motion:

> *That this Assembly takes note of the review of health and social care in Northern Ireland published on 13 December 2011. — [Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]*

Mr McCarthy: The Alliance Party welcomes the publication of the document. We welcome the concept of the right healthcare being available at the right place and in the right time frame. Let us hope that that can be obtained. The document has some 99 recommendations — all very laudable — but, given that there were more than 1,500 contributors and nine pages of issues, it is imperative that the Minister and the Department listen to those voices, which include patients, carers, staff, unions, groups and the community in general, so that they can influence decisions and, as such, see benefits coming from their participation.

The Alliance Party supports recommendation 1, which deals with prevention and early detection of illness. The new Public Health Agency has played a very important role to get the message across to people to look after their health, and I have no doubt that it will continue to do so. Recommendation 46 speaks of a new Headstart programme. We urgently need to continue to give support to existing groups, such as Home-Start, Sure Start, and so on. Those groups have done fantastic work for Northern Ireland and for children from birth to age 5. That is where early lifestyles are taught, and, in the long run, it will pay dividends.

We welcome recommendations 7 and 25, which talk about an expanded role for community pharmacy. Hopefully, the mistakes of the past are now behind us and the Department will now sit down with urgency with Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland and properly fund that excellent community facility sooner rather than later.

We fully support proposals for senior citizens who fall ill and are in poor health to remain in their own homes with the community care that is already being provided continuing. I pay tribute to all those in the community who are engaged in community care and provide an excellent service. Long may that continue.

Social care should be thought of as a preventative tool, as suggested by Age NI. A little bit of help at the right time can prevent serious illness further down the line. The review must continue to serve our ill and isolated elderly people by continuing to provide a good, nutritional meal each day through what was known as the meals-on-wheels service.

Speeding up the delivery of the Bamford report is paramount. Mental health has long been the Cinderella of the health service, as, indeed, have been people with a learning disability. Recommendation 33, the extra provision of respite facilities, is essential if we are to make inroads into those vital services.

Tackling the stigma and discrimination still associated with mental illness must be made a priority throughout society, including in the workplace. The Alliance Party supports the

Mental Capacity (Health, Welfare and Finance) Bill, which will help to reduce stigma by treating all who lack mental capacity under the same legislation and with the same high level of safeguards. We need joined-up working between Departments to tackle stigma and promote good mental health and well-being. Cutting funding for the psychological therapy services strategy was, in our opinion, short-sighted, as it is well documented that such therapies can provide long-term solutions to mental health problems, thus aiding the person and saving money further down the line. The dementia strategy must also be taken seriously. The number of people who will suffer dementia or act as carers will increase rapidly. I think that that has already been recognised. It is, again, short-sighted to ignore that.

The Alliance Party supports the full implementation of the 'Equal Lives' report—

Mr Speaker: Will the Member bring his remarks to a close?

Mr McCarthy: — that arose from the Bamford review. Services should include a full range of respite options for people with learning disabilities.

In conclusion, Mr Speaker, page 142 —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr McCarthy: I support the motion.

Ms P Bradley: I welcome the Minister's motion to debate the review of health and social care. As someone who worked in the health and social care system, I can speak from first-hand experience and state that the present health and social care model is in need of radical change. As the Minister has said on many occasions, doing nothing is not an option. The review focuses very much on the individual service user, which, sadly, has not been the case for some time. The one-size-fits-all approach has left many individuals and their families with a less than adequate service.

One of the review's major themes was service provision for older people. During my years working in Whiteabbey Hospital and Antrim Area Hospital, I witnessed a constant trail of unnecessary admissions, which led in some cases to unnecessary hospital-acquired infections and, of course, untimely discharges from hospital. I also witnessed the lack of services in the community to cope with the increasing demands of our ageing population. To me, this review brings a spark of hope that health and social care for our older population will at last be delivered in a manner that suits their needs and not the needs of the service. I have said before in the Chamber that we are failing the generation who brought us to where we are now.

The review has a strong theme of providing care and managing conditions at home or in the community, as opposed to through acute care. It talks about more "integrated" services and, most importantly, "personalised care" and encouraging independence. It promotes the empowerment of the service user in the delivery of services required. In Northern Ireland, we are fortunate to have a combined health and social care system that is delivered by a professional and dedicated workforce who daily go over and above their role. We owe it not only to the service user but to that dedicated workforce to embrace change and deliver a health and social care system that meets the needs of all who use it.

I opened my copy of the review with great anticipation. Reading it, I am encouraged by its findings and its proposals for the path ahead. It would be easy, at this time, to become short-sighted and to focus purely on my area of North Belfast, which definitely has its fair share of health inequalities. However, I believe that we should look at the document holistically and see in it a clear path for improvement.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate, and I thank the Minister for tabling the motion.

A lot has been said, so I will not deliberate much more on it; I know that there is a time for this. I welcome the review's findings on the early interventions that support positive life outcomes. It should be a life-cycle approach, with priority focus on early years, allowing for continuing early intervention, as some children and families will need additional support at different times of their lives.

Any early intervention must address the inequalities and barriers that hinder parents supporting the best outcomes for their children. The review team acknowledges the inequalities that exist, and any early intervention needs to be targeted at those areas most in need. There also needs to be increased funding for existing early-intervention programmes delivered by local providers. I, too, welcome the recommendations on the proposals for the integrated services, and I acknowledge that GPs are often the first point of contact for families and individuals with health issues.

Community-based and patient-focused primary care is a valued and much utilised area of our healthcare. Patient experience is at a very high level and, given that high level of confidence and trust and the fact that our GPs are well placed to do more of the work that is currently carried out in the acute settings, primary care should be resourced to provide more care in the community. Many elective procedures, such as dermatology and EMT, could be carried out by GPs with specialist training; the role of the specialist nurse practitioner could be better utilised in areas of care. That would be an effective use of resources, enabling GPs to develop skills to provide care in the community while taking the pressure off our acute hospitals.

I, too, welcome a continued focus on mental health and suicide, particularly the emphasis on young men, although we need to acknowledge that young men constitute one of many groups affected by suicide. The report needs to be clear on when intervention is recommended. Many groups and organisations do good work promoting mental health, but it is widely acknowledged that more can be done. We need to ensure that there will be increased funding, allowing those groups and organisations to continue their good work.

There is serious concern among the public about what day services will provide for those in need. There has already been a downgrading of services, and there are regional inequalities, particularly in the west, the area that I represent. We need to place a particular focus on those with complex needs. The review advocates promoting independence and more community-based options; it also tells us that respite provision has increased, although service users would differ on that. There is a lack of provision in some areas, particularly west of the Bann. We need equality of access to services, particularly for rural areas.

The review tells us of a commitment to close long-stay institutions and to complete the resettlement process by 2015. Evidence of the impact assessment needs to be shown in that area, as feedback from carers is that resettlement will not work for everyone. They ask where individuals will be placed, and there remain service users who require full-time care in a core facility. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Ms Lewis: I speak on the motion as a member of the Health, Social Services and Public Safety Committee. The report is probably one of the most important for a generation in shaping and developing the health and social care service and making it fit for purpose. Its findings are stark. They suggest that if we, as legislators, stand idle, the health service will grind to a halt and fail to deliver for those at its centre — the users. Many will ask why we need change. Demand on our health and social care system in Northern Ireland is increasing due to an ageing population, and with age we all demand more healthcare and support. Demand for services could increase by 4% by 2015, for example, and the cost of that is glaring.

3.45 pm

Furthermore, we suffer from an increased demand for, and over-reliance on, hospital beds, which provides visible evidence of the need for change. A bed utilisation audit of 2011 showed that up to 42% of the inpatients reviewed should not have been in hospital. It is one aspect of our health service that we need to change.

The report outlines six compelling points at the centre of change: to be better at preventing ill health; to provide patient-centred care; to manage increasing demand across all programmes of care; to tackle health inequalities; to deliver high-quality evidence-based service; and to support our workforce in delivering the necessary change. I, for one, do not think that any of us in the House could disagree with any of those points. Many of us will have experience of the health service at some point in our lives or even just have listened and spoken to people on the ground about their concerns around and experiences of the health service.

The new model puts the user at the centre of care and offers the patient the opportunity to work with health practitioners to maintain a good and healthy lifestyle. The new model is local, ensuring that services can be accessed locally and are community-focused. I welcome that as, far too often, people are expected to travel long distances to access care. Of course, the Minister has highlighted the fact that travelling further can lead to improved care and rates of recovery.

The new model also promotes a joined-up approach to healthcare, not only among healthcare professionals but among neighbouring jurisdictions within the British Isles. Users deserve nothing other than the best care on offer. The new model will ensure that that is the case, and it will be user-focused and user-friendly.

The findings of the report are not to be taken lightly or mothballed. I am pleased that the Minister is taking action to secure a system that meets the needs of its users. I know that the Minister is committed to our health service, which is free at the point of entry and committed to putting the user at the centre of care. The new model seeks to bring about a change for the better and strike the right balance in line with the needs of society and the funding available.

Mr Swann: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this issue today. It is only fitting to thank John Compton and his team for coming up with such a considerable and broad-reaching report. The review made a series of recommendations on how savings were to be made across the remit of the Department, and I do not intend to dwell on the points that have been made. However, I hope that the Minister and his party appreciate that the points that Michael McGimpsey and the senior departmental officials made this time last year have now been proven to be justified.

Costs are rising, demand is increasing and, in light of spending reductions, change is inevitable. However, it is the extent and the speed of change that will be important. The review proposes fundamental change, the biggest and most overarching for a generation. Therefore, it is crucial that it be got right first time round.

It will not have come as a surprise to the Minister or the authors of the review that the headlines immediately following the publication of the review concentrated primarily on the remarks regarding the provision of acute hospitals across Northern Ireland. There are 10 acute hospitals in Northern Ireland. Interestingly, on 13 December, the Minister made the commitment that all 10 would remain open but that they would not all retain their emergency services provision.

The review noted that an area in Great Britain with a similar population of 1·8 million would only be catered for by four acute hospitals. However, it must be borne in mind that the rurality of Northern Ireland has historically influenced the number of hospitals provided. That may ultimately be why the review has recommended between five and seven acute hospitals in Northern Ireland.

Although the review does not spell out which hospitals will lose services, it does warn that the changes need to take place by 2016. Members have already been on their feet putting forward the case for their local hospitals, and I do not intend to be any different. There is a feeling across the north coast, particularly in Coleraine, that the proposals will downgrade the Causeway Hospital and rob it of its acute services. Frankly, I feel that that would be disastrous for the north coast and much of north Antrim and east Londonderry. I urge the Minister not to close the Causeway or any other hospitals through stealth, as we saw with the Lagan Valley and Belfast City A&Es. I hope that a trend does not develop of A&Es closing under the guise of senior staff positions going unfilled.

Of course, all this is currently hypothetical. Although the report is substantial in size, the actual recommendations are vague. As the saying goes, the devil will be in the detail. The implementation plan is to follow the principles laid down in the guidelines by June 2012. The problem I have is that the guidelines sound more like aspirations. There is significant scepticism as to whether the timeline will be met, not least because of the complex mechanism that will be followed. The integrated care partnerships will have to advise the five local commissioning groups across Northern Ireland as they make proposals, along with the health board. Although it is appropriate that those bodies have a central role to play in formulating the new policies, I fear that the process has the potential to become cumbersome and unwieldy.

I hope that the Minister takes on board the points and concerns raised by Members, and I emphasise to him the need to be upfront and consult appropriately with patients and staff alike.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I too welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. Tribute has been rightly paid to the review body, but it should also be paid to the people who currently work in the health service and do an invaluable job. There are many problems and challenges that face the health service, but one of the biggest challenges facing us in the future is the care of the elderly. It is projected that, by 2020, our elderly population will have doubled. People are living longer but not necessarily more healthily. Many of the report's recommendations in relation to the elderly are to be welcomed, particularly in promoting healthy eating and for more services provided at home and in the community. Also to be welcomed is more support for carers, who perform such an important and valuable role, which, all too often, is not recognised.

Mental health is an ever increasing problem. Since I became a Member of the Assembly, there has been much discussion and debate about the Bamford review. Perhaps, in the near future, we will see the implementation and outworkings of Bamford. That is long overdue.

Provision for people with learning disabilities requires long-term support, as mentioned in the review. Many older parents are reaching an age at which they feel provision has to be made for sons and daughters with learning disabilities, because those parents may not be around in the future to look after them. That needs to be addressed.

The Minister has mentioned the number of hospitals and acute care provision. Not unreasonably, a report like this, which is so wide-ranging, raises the spectre of parochialisation. No doubt, as has already been mentioned, every MLA will put forward a strong case for their local hospitals. The Minister has told me in response to questions that no decision has been taken about any particular facility, so I will once again promote the case of Daisy Hill Hospital. The Health Committee, on our visit of 7 December 2011, was very impressed in relation to sustainability, resilience, safety that fits the bill, and best practice there. Evidence shows that people who suffer an ischemic stroke who receive thrombolytic treatment within three hours are more than twice as likely to have favourable outcomes. The current record at Daisy Hill for the provision of that treatment is eight minutes.

In the all-Ireland context, only two of the recommendations, as far as I can see, specifically mention other jurisdictions, with regard to very specialist paediatric services and child and adolescent mental health services. In my constituency, the cross-border dimension is already well demonstrated, with approximately 3,500 people from the South accessing A&E in Daisy Hill last year, and with people from north Louth accessing the renal unit at Daisy Hill.

I hope that the Minister is pragmatic in addressing that area. He has already stated that he will be, and I am sure and I hope that he will continue to take that approach. I also hope that he will take into account the recommendations of the North/South feasibility study that he recently made available and will implement some of its recommendations.

Ms Ritchie: I thank the Minister for facilitating this debate and for the report that is under consideration. Fundamental to every person's rights in Northern Ireland is access to health and medical provision. For me, this document is very much crystalised by the words "self-help", "prevention" and "independence". Clearly, all those things depend on very strong family, community and voluntary support mechanisms, working directly with the providers to deliver the care and health models that should lead, and which we would like to see leading, to optimum health and medical outcomes for all.

I want to ask a very cautionary question. Although I fully recognise the fact that Mr Compton, his team and the Minister want to ensure that there is an efficient use of resources and that there are good medical and health outcomes for everybody, will the outworkings of the report deliver the desired objectives in improving those medical and health outcomes and in creating the efficiencies that we so earnestly desire? Is this the right way to do that? Will it ensure a fair and equitable allocation of resources? Will it address those issues? Will the final outcomes and outworkings of the report address the marginalisation currently felt by many rural communities with regard to their inability to access local health and medical resources? Some of those areas will be the benchmarks against which the contents of the document will be measured. Will it ensure that the suggested model, in which the use of the community and voluntary sector is envisaged, has the ability to be sustainable and resilient? What benchmarks have the Minister and Mr Compton's review measured that against?

In considering those issues, and in the outworkings of the document, I would like the Minister to give consideration to some local issues. I suppose all politics are local. I remember the assertion made by the Minister about me during the questions: he said that I was posing local issues. For all of us, health is local; it is particular to the individual, their family and the community in which you live or serve. Take the Downe Hospital, for example. With the closure, albeit temporary, of accident and emergency in a Belfast hospital, pressure is definitely being put on the Ulster Hospital, the Mater and the Royal Victoria Hospital. We in the south Down area have to travel to Belfast for necessary acute hospital care, and, in many instances, after 10.00 pm we have to travel for accident and emergency care. Since we have the capacity for accident and emergency and other provision during the day, is there not a case for the people of Belfast to travel to south Down for that necessary care? Could the Minister give that some consideration? If you can travel in one direction for that care, why can you not travel in the other direction? If we want to have balanced regional development and balanced health and medical care provision, why is that not a possibility?

There is already much North/South provision in Daisy Hill Hospital, particularly with County Louth. I would like to see a copper-fastening and underpinning of that North/South provision, and I think the document makes provision for it. With the provision of the second theatre, I am in no doubt that the area of specialism for which Daisy Hill Hospital caters — paediatric care and children's medicine — could be provided for there.

In conclusion, this document gives us much food for thought. It is a pathway and a direction of travel for an optimal healthcare and medical care provision in Northern

Ireland, hopefully, but it will be measured against its outworkings and on whether our rural communities are properly catered for.

Mr Spratt: I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. I commend the Minister and the review team for producing the report. I would like to pick up on a couple of points in the report, one of which is provision for the elderly and those with long-term conditions and how that will focus more on the individual.

The report states that care should be provided either at home or as close to the patient's home as possible. That also applies to patients who require palliative or end-of-life care, and that is welcome in the community. Generally, people are more comfortable and relaxed in their own home, and they are entitled to have some dignity in their final days.

4.00 pm

I also want to draw attention to the work carried out by the Centre for Independent Living, an organisation that supports disabled people and allows them to provide their own carers, in many cases in their own home. The centre provides guidance on employment as well as payroll support for those who require it. It is an excellent provision, as it allows disabled people to have a choice in who cares for them and, at the same time, relieves social services of the task of allocating and managing carers. Those who avail themselves of the service are also allowed not only to have relatives as carers, if that is what the individual wants, but to have a stranger in their home if that is what is required. That needs to be encouraged in the community.

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

I want to touch on one other area. I declare an interest as a sufferer of type 2 diabetes. Some very good work is going on in GP practices throughout the Province. In my case, I was diagnosed through normal screening. Whenever you reach a certain age, you are screened every 12 months. I will not disclose that age unless the Minister forces me to. Through that screening, I was diagnosed as having type 2 diabetes. It was previously unknown to me that I had it. Over the past two years, all my drug control has been done through the GP practice. A dedicated GP in the practice looks after diabetes sufferers, and a dedicated nursing sister looks after the care and screening every six months. To date, I have not had to avail myself of either hospital or consultant care. That is one of the areas that has been looked at in the report, and evidence has been taken on it. I want the Minister to assure the House today that, where there is good practice in GP practices — it is happening in many practices throughout the Province — the Department will ensure that funding for those areas will continue to be made to encourage and allow good practice. That would allow GP surgeries to continue with that sort of care, relieving the need for chronic diseases such as diabetes to be cared for at a local level, as opposed to putting more pressure on already busy hospitals and consultants. My experience proves that that and, I suspect, many other treatments could be treated in a similar way at local level. I hope that the Minister will ensure that the Department continues to fund those areas. I welcome the fact that I have been able to give that as an example of good practice in our Province's healthcare system.

Mr Wells: This document is the most significant publication on health service provision in Northern Ireland for a generation. I pay tribute to John Compton and his team for the excellent work that they have done. I have had the privilege of knowing John in various roles: first in the Down Lisburn Trust and later in the South Eastern Trust and then as the chief executive of the board. Many of us believe that he is one of the most competent, knowledgeable and experienced hospital clinical managers in the entire Province, if not the entire United Kingdom. Therefore, many of us come at this from the angle that we respect not only the contents of the report but the driving force behind it. I have good cause to trust much of John's judgement on many other issues. That flavours, to some extent, my view on his report.

The report is not only significant but crucial. As Deputy Chair of the Health Committee, I had many, many opportunities during the formulation of the Compton report to meet individuals and discuss it with them, sometimes privately, sometimes publicly. The very clear trend that I see among clinicians, the royal colleges, service users, politicians and unions is that the report is, in its general thrust, getting it right. It is one thing to say that privately, but, if we as an Assembly believe that to be the case, we will have to step up to the mark and support its implementation.

There was some media coverage when the report was published just before Christmas, but I do not believe that the community has really grasped its significance. With the holidays and people's minds being on other things, they have not yet realised just how significant the report is. Only when they realise its significance might pressure be put on individual MLAs. It is one thing to say that we generally support the thrust of the Compton report and what it is trying to do, but, when it affects something in our backyard, we put up the barricades and start protesting. There are difficult issues in the report; we cannot run away from them.

Mr McCarthy: In supporting the document as far as it goes, does the Member agree that the volume of input into the consultation was such that it is vital for those voices to be taken into consideration when the Minister and the Department come to implement the review? There was, I understand, input from over 1,500 individuals, and the document contains nine pages of issues that the people we represent want to see implemented.

Mr Wells: I think, to a large extent, that they have been taken into consideration. This debate and the inevitable public debate will also flavour the Minister's view on these important issues.

Remember, Members — those of you who are old enough to do so — that we have been here before. 'Developing Better Services' is almost a decade old. We looked at that document and did not have the political courage to deliver on it because, for many people, it was just too painful. Having not acted on that, we face a very stark choice now: either we voluntarily plan for the future health service provision of Northern Ireland and implement good policy or we have that provision forced on us in a very unpalatable and disorganised way. That is the choice that we have to face up to.

Difficult decisions have to be made. Nobody has mentioned the document's recommendation that GPs be grouped into 17 integrated care partnerships. Some GPs will not like that.

One-man GP practices and father-and-son practices up in the mountains, out in the sticks or maybe even in urban areas will not like the idea of coming together and co-operating with their fellow GPs. That will be a difficult issue.

Residential homes have hardly been mentioned. Three or four years ago, there was a proposal to rationalise residential homes, and we know about the political pressure that we all came under from concerned people throughout Northern Ireland. There were five people in a residential home in my constituency, and it was going to cost £800,000 to fix the roof. Although many residents were going to be moved on to other forms of care anyhow, a strong political lobby said that the home had to be saved. If we as individual MLAs believe that the document is best for the provision of health and social care in Northern Ireland, we must have the courage to stand up and disagree with some constituents and say that, for the overall good of Northern Ireland, we will have to go with it. It will be interesting to see how many take that stand and how many others will simply look at the opposition and buckle under the pressure.

There is, of course, the terribly difficult issue of A&Es. As the Minister rightly said, if his local hospital could not provide proper care, he would rather be driven past its door to a hospital that could than die on the operating table. The view must be that we need to get people to where they can best be treated.

A particular aspect of the document that I welcome is the fact that many of our hospitals are full of people who should not be there in the first place for various good reasons, either because of lifestyle choices that have an impact on their health or because they are using their hospital as their local GP surgery. I welcome the fact that there will be more emphasis on the prevention of smoking and alcohol abuse, which has to include minimum pricing, and obesity.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close, please.

Mr Wells: Generally speaking, this document has considerable merit, and we as MLAs will have to get together and give it our full support.

Ms Lo: I welcome the review and the proposed structure to implement the recommendations. The Alliance Party is open to any change or reconfiguration that will result in improved outcomes for patients, including those in rural areas. The needs of people must be at the centre of the health and social care system. However, any changes in services need to be balanced by other actions, such as better information and a better transport system. Resources must be put into reliable transport systems, including public transport, for patients. That would very much be an example of cross-departmental working so that everyone can have equal access to the services they require. Good information is critical to giving people confidence in changes to services and the understanding that travelling further is not a disadvantage but may provide access to better services and quality care.

Investment needs to be directed to emergency personnel and services, numbers of ambulance staff, training and state-of-the-art equipment for paramedics to allow excellent care en route to hospital. More non-acute services should be provided locally as well.

The Alliance Party supports the move to services in the community but would emphasise that the appropriate resources must be made available in the community to support such services. Those resources should include the necessary funding, the correct profile of staff and staff training and partnership working across all sectors — statutory, voluntary and community. All appropriate community services should be available, including community pharmacy, and my colleague spoke about that earlier. All the necessary professionals should be included in community teams, including allied health professionals, such as physiotherapists and occupational therapists, to provide treatment that can allow people to avoid hospital admission, remain in their own home and return to work, thereby improving the quality of life for the patient and saving money.

The Alliance Party is happy to consider a number of efficiencies, including many of those in the McKinsey report, but draws the line at charging for services. We support the need to reduce reliance on accident and emergency services. Too many people, due to a lack of awareness, use A&E as an alternative to visiting their GP, an out-of-hours doctor or a minor injuries unit. We support the proposal to make better and more integrated use of the community and voluntary sector. In terms of other efficiency measures, we support placing emphasis on public health — quality of diet, exercise, smoking prevention and so on — and on prevention and early intervention to ease demand and cost pressures. We support the proposal for better use of technology, for example, to support people in their home, to monitor and manage prescriptions and for remote care.

It is important to seek greater emphasis on better home and community services. We support the development of shared services on a North/South basis. Benchmarking with other jurisdictions should also be undertaken to ensure that best practice examples are taken into account.

In respect of public health, we believe that tackling the major issues of obesity, smoking and alcohol consumption will save lives and money, by preventing serious illness further down the line. The money saved can then be invested in other services. The Alliance Party welcomes the implementation of the obesity prevention framework. We support the prioritisation —

4.15 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close, please.

Ms Lo: — of draft tobacco regulations and call for a robust and clearly timetabled tobacco control strategy.

Mrs Overend: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on the motion. I am speaking on the issue not only as an MLA but as a mother of three young children who has depended on the National Health Service for many reasons on numerous occasions. My family connection, however, does not stop there. I have a 96-year-old grandmother, parents, brothers and sisters, including a sister-in-law who suffered a stroke only two weeks ago at the age of 52, all of whom I would expect to get the finest care. It does not matter who you are: the health service plays an important role in your life, from the youngest to the oldest in your family.

Health is arguably one of the biggest issues facing us as Members, as an Assembly and as a country. It is

understandable, then, that people get emotional about possible cuts to and reform of the National Health Service. It has become like a family member to many of us. Those who depend on it, particularly the elderly and the young, need an effective health service, not just an efficient one. Health reforms should not be driven solely by statistics and cost but by the needs of the community. The Compton review is set against a background of increasing demand and diminishing resources. Many warned that the Health Department would not get the financial support that it needed under the current Budget arrangements, and I think that the fact that the current Health Minister had to close some A&Es is a sign of that pressure.

There are several key recommendations in the report, the most eye-catching of which relate to acute hospitals in Northern Ireland. Antrim Area Hospital, which serves my constituency, is one such. In the report, we hear about transferring services from the hospital to the community. Over four years, £83 million will be diverted to community care services; that equates to 5% of their current budgets. Pressures on hospital budgets have already increased by 2% per annum because of Northern Ireland's ageing population and by another 2% per annum to allow for the advancement of medical and surgical techniques. Therefore, hospitals will be able to provide that additional 5% — £83 million — only if there is significant change to the number and profile of patients being admitted to acute hospitals. There is a significant number of unknowns in that equation. Dealing with the health service in such a manner is unacceptable.

Antrim hospital is already under pressure; not only is it overused, but it needs more nursing provision. If more pressure is placed on its budget, the situation will only get worse. We hear continually about the failings of Antrim hospital. I have one such story about a constituent who went to Antrim hospital with a heart complaint at 8.00 pm: he was not seen until 2.00 am and was on a trolley for a total of 44 hours. That demands change now, not in six months' time. It is wholly inappropriate to make choices based on money when dealing with everyday lives and, more important, life or death situations. I recognise that the status quo is not working and that we have to take a serious look at the health service. However, I do not support taking a slash-and-burn approach to services to do so.

We must best manage a process of reform that meets the needs of the people of Northern Ireland in the 21st century. I therefore question several areas of the report, not for political gain but because of the huge impact that it will have on everyday lives in Northern Ireland. Our constituents deserve a world-class service, be it in health, education or policing. We owe it to them to debate and scrutinise the future of health provision fully and rigorously. We have an under-resourced and understaffed health service, and yet we must ensure that it always operates in a safe and efficient manner. I therefore challenge the Health Minister to deliver a sustainable and world-class health service but not one driven solely by stats and cost. May I dare to hope that the Minister of Finance and Personnel will find another £120 million, similar to what he found for the Department of Education, and give it to his colleague in the Health Department in order to help with the delivery of reform?

Mr Storey: I also welcome the opportunity to contribute to a debate on what is, as other Members said, a critical and vital piece of work by John Compton and his colleagues. I commend the Minister for taking the initiative on the issue. We now have in place an overview of the issues that face the health service.

It is only right and proper — other Members have said this — to place on record our gratitude to those who work in the health service. We so easily take for granted the provision that we already have in Northern Ireland. Although there are difficulties and, as the previous Member who spoke indicated, issues can be raised about an individual or individuals who face certain problems and difficulties, we have to set that against the background of the millions of pounds that are spent on health each year and the many thousands who are helped by the health service to address a variety of issues.

I also underscore the fact that, as politicians, we have a deficiency: we do not go to the closing of anything. We go to the opening of everything; that is what we do. We go to the opening of envelopes and the opening of doors because we think that that is the right thing for politicians to do. It is always unpalatable, difficult and challenging if there are, in our locality, services that have to close. I speak from personal experience. I have already had a discussion with the Health Minister, along with my colleague the MP for North Antrim, Ian Paisley Junior, and my MLA colleagues, on a number of health issues. In a letter that he sent to me in October 2011, the Minister said that the Causeway Hospital was here to stay. I welcome that, and I will deal specifically with that hospital in a moment.

When we look at services in our area, it needs to be remembered that my constituency of North Antrim is not serviced by an acute hospital within its confines: Antrim Area Hospital is in South Antrim, and the Causeway Hospital is in East Londonderry. Let us never forget that the people of Ballymoney and the surrounding area have already made the sacrifice when it comes to acute provision. The Route Hospital is no longer open; it closed on the promise that the service provided elsewhere would be immensely better than the one that had been in place there.

I have gone through all the press statements from political opponents and commentators. Although the focus has been, to a degree, rightly placed on the Causeway Hospital, it seems as though Dalriada Hospital in Ballycastle has fallen off the face of the earth and is no longer an issue. It is for me. There are concerns about what may happen to Dalriada. Furthermore — the Minister knows about this issue — what about the provision at the Robinson Hospital? I pay tribute to those who, as a result of the Robinson Trust, ensured that, from the early 1940s, we have had a hospital on the Newel Road that has given immense service to the people of Ballymoney.

I listened to my colleague Mr Swann, who basically said that the Causeway Hospital was going to be closed by stealth. I remind him of what Mr McGimpsey said when it came to hospitals:

> *"we cannot sustain indefinitely local hospitals with acute services where it is virtually impossible to recruit". — [Official Report, Bound Volume 51, p301, col 2].*

That is what he said when he closed the A&E departments of the Mid-Ulster Hospital and Whiteabbey Hospital. Therefore, neither this party nor this Minister needs to take a lecture from a party that, when it held the Health portfolio,

did not really deliver the goods. It is imperative, and I conclude with these comments —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close, please.

Mr Storey: Having spoken to the cardiac service users in the Causeway Hospital —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up.

Mr Storey: — I think that it is imperative that they be listened to. All who have a vested interest in the retention of the excellent services in that hospital should have a voice and be listened to.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle Tá áthas orm deis a bheith agam páirt a ghlacadh sa díospóireacht thábhachtach seo ar chúrsaí sláinte. I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this important debate about health matters.

Since the Compton report was published, I have spoken about it to many constituents, particularly in the greater Newry area. There is concern about one particular theme: ensuring that the present status of Daisy Hill Hospital is maintained into the future. Leaks prior to the report's publication created consternation in the area. Daisy Hill covers a wide rural catchment area that stretches into south Armagh and south Down. The topography of that area is such that it is not always possible to reach other hospitals within what is known as the golden hour. I would prefer to arrive alive in Daisy Hill than dead in Belfast, but Mr Wells may hold another view.

I welcome the recent investment in and developments at Daisy Hill. They should be built on and not diminished in any way. Daisy Hill has a very busy emergency department that, as was mentioned earlier, saw over 36,000 patients last year. That figure is repeated annually. Investment has enabled the A&E department to double in size. The Compton report recognises that Daisy Hill's emergency department sees 95% of its patients within four hours and meets the waiting time standards. Few hospitals can claim such an excellent record, and I praise Daisy Hill for what should be an important consideration in planning the future services at the hospital.

Mr Wells is right when he says that there is great public concern about residential care. We saw that concern in public campaigns in the past. I wonder whether Compton's views on residential care correspond with those of the public and whether the public in Northern Ireland want what Compton wants. In my experience, many residents and families are very happy with the standard of care that they receive in a residential setting and would take a dim view of proposals to close such highly regarded facilities.

All of that raises the question of consultation on the Compton proposals. As public representatives, we are glad to have the opportunity to express our views here today. However, that raises the question of whether the general public will be afforded the right to express their views. Perhaps the Minister would like to address that point later.

As other Members said, the report recognises that there is plenty of potential to share services on a cross-border basis. That will benefit people in both jurisdictions. In my area, we have already seen good work on that front in renal and emergency services. The report recognises that there is still huge untapped potential. I ask the Minister to ensure that that potential is fully exploited. In doing so, perhaps his first step would be to designate a senior official from his Department to take responsibility for that area of healthcare.

There is much in the report to be welcomed, and time —

4.30 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr D Bradley: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I was just about to say that time does not afford me the opportunity to deal with all the issues. However, my other colleagues, I think, have dealt with them, and colleagues yet to speak will continue with that. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr I McCrea: As I have said in other debates, the further you are down the list, the less there is to say, so I hope not to use up the whole five minutes, which, I am sure, people will be glad to hear. Nonetheless, this is a welcome debate. Although I have not been in the Chamber for the full debate, I listened to most of it in my room. It is welcome that almost everyone who spoke accepts that change is required. How we go about that may not always be the thing we agree on. Nonetheless, there is a general acceptance that change is required. I commend the Minister for stepping up to the mark and taking the steps required to try to bring about that change.

It would be remiss of me not to continue in the same vein as others and keep the debate on a constituency basis. Anyone who has heard me speak on health issues will know that the Mid Ulster Hospital is very close to my heart in respect of its constituency facility and main healthcare provision. Unfortunately, the previous Health Minister saw fit to remove acute services from the Mid Ulster Hospital. Although I believe that that decision was premature —

Mr McCallister: Will the Member give way?

Mr I McCrea: Yes, I am happy to.

Mr McCallister: I realise that the Member may not have been in the Chamber for the opening statement by the Minister, who spoke about safety and the pressures that would result. The decision that the Member blames Michael McGimpsey for was based on clinical reasons: there physically were not the staff to manage Mid Ulster and Whiteabbey hospitals. One of the drivers for the reform process — which Michael McGimpsey initiated and Minister Poots, when he took over the Department, continued with a different review team — is that such changes will have to be made. He is now arguing about Mid Ulster while supporting a process that could potentially halve the number of A&Es in Northern Ireland.

Mr I McCrea: The Member needs to check his facts. Acute services at the Mid Ulster Hospital were proven not to have been closed due to an inability to provide the services. It was a joint decision. It was joined with the decision to close or remove services from Whiteabbey because it could not provide the level of staff, and Mid Ulster was joined with that. The Mid Ulster Hospital has always been able to provide the level of service required to retain acute services.

I am not disagreeing with the premise of the debate, and if, within that debate, the Mid Ulster had to lose its acute services, that was part of the decision. I am saying that it was the wrong time to do that. Antrim Area Hospital took over as the main local acute hospital. Sandra Overend referred to one of the many people who are left on trolleys there. Mind you, the Minister was saying that they are not the trolleys that you find in a supermarket, so maybe it is not always that bad when you are left on a trolley. However, it is not that good either when you are left for many hours on a trolley.

Nonetheless, the decision was premature — maybe not always the wrong decision but a premature one — when it came to the closure of acute services at the Mid Ulster Hospital. The cracks are being papered over at Antrim Area Hospital. Anybody who listens to any conversation about Antrim — other than the visit that I believe the Minister made, when there did not seem to be too many problems — will hear that, on any night of the week, there are a lot of difficulties in people getting attended to at the acute services there.

A number of issues relate to debates that we have had in the past. One issue is the minor injuries unit at the Mid Ulster Hospital and the extension of its opening hours. I would certainly welcome that outcome of the report and the review. There are many issues. My colleague from South Down referred to the number of people who are in hospitals who should not always be there. I accept that. As someone who does not attend a doctor's surgery or, indeed, a hospital too often and who, probably, should be there when I am supposed to be to learn how to eat properly and exercise — mind you, mine is a body of complete fitness — I believe that it is part and parcel of the entire process that needs to take place to encourage people not to use the health service for minor issues and, indeed, to use the minor injuries unit when appropriate.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close, please.

Mr I McCrea: I welcome the debate and hope that we have a positive outcome.

Mr Beggs: I, too, thank the Minister for bringing forward the motion and the Business Committee for committing three hours to this very important discussion area. Changes are afoot in the health service. It is important that they are discussed and appreciated and that the best model comes forward.

The report highlights the demographic changes that are occurring in Northern Ireland. In particular, it highlights the growth of the elderly population. We are all growing older and can expect to stay alive longer. That is to be welcomed, but it also means that there will be an increasing burden on the health service.

There are also growing concerns about pressures on various A&E departments. Once again, I highlight Antrim Area Hospital, about which concerns have been mentioned to me. Clearly, unacceptable trolley waits have happened there. We need to create alternative pathways in order to prevent bottlenecks occurring in hospitals where there are major A&E departments if people could be treated better elsewhere and closer to their homes. At present, that option does not exist. I welcome the fact that better services can be provided locally.

The A&E department at the Moyle Hospital — formerly the Larne District Hospital — closed over a decade ago. It is, probably, two decades ago now. Why could some of the service that would have been provided in that type of facility not be provided locally? Surely that would be better. I know that, when there were plans to close the only remaining hospital ward in my constituency at Inver House, plans were floated to show that a minor injuries unit or GP-led unit could be created. They were, however, quickly pulled off the table towards the end of that process when it was recognised that there were no funds for such a unit. I suspect that funds are needed to put those facilities into the community. Nevertheless, it would be an important improvement to treat minor injuries locally through GP services, so that lengthy travel times to A&E departments would not be required, consultants there could concentrate on the vital work that they do and minor injuries could be treated elsewhere. At present, those trolley waits are unacceptable.

Recently, I learned about a vulnerable elderly lady who lives in a nursing home who spent four and a half hours in A&E waiting for a planned X-ray — a planned X-ray, not an emergency X-ray. In fact, she was abandoned there. It was dreadful. Most local dentists have X-ray services in their local clinics. Why can GPs not have X-rays facilities, be able to use modern technology and pull in expert radiographers who will be able to give second opinions if they are needed or, if necessary, when concern has arisen, forward issues to main hospitals at that point? Clearly, more work should be delegated back to GPs. They should not simply be a referral service. More work should be carried out locally. Inver House is the last remaining ward in my constituency.

At present, there is a rehabilitation unit, and I argue that concentrated rehabilitation located in the community, along with the interaction of family and friends, aids recovery and the ultimate return of that person to a home setting or alternative care setting. It is also important that local palliative care continues. In bringing changes forward, it is easy to forget such important things, but they are needed so that family members can spend precious time with their loved ones when they are in difficulties. That was almost overlooked, so it is important that such issues are not overlooked as changes come forward.

I welcome the concentration on health and well-being in the report, because prevention is always better than cure. I noticed that the report highlights the concern about alcohol misuse, and I declare an interest as a member of Carrickfergus Community Drug and Alcohol Advisory Group-. There are some interesting statistics. For instance, half of all smokers will die of cancer. That is frightening. Why would anybody smoke? The growing issue of obesity and the time bomb of diabetes is another issue that will add pressure in the future. We also need to make use of everyone in the service, including our pharmacists, and ensure that appropriate services are provided for people in need.

Mr Irwin: I welcome the opportunity to comment on this matter today. This issue more than any other has generated the greatest interest from the perspective of both the public and those involved across the health service. I must also say that our current Minister more than any other has demonstrated that he is not afraid to take the issue on, and it is clear that he is keen to make a difference and see the health service transformed. It has not gone unnoticed that we previously had a Minister who was very much at odds

with his Executive, and it seemed to me that his only public comments consisted of excuses and hiding behind his budget. That was not good enough, and it is refreshing to see that our new Minister is making progress.

Over the past few months, it has become clear that the majority of people agree that some form of change is absolutely necessary to ensure that our health service evolves and meets the challenges that are now before it. The debate, of course, is about how that change is managed and ensuring that we focus on the needs of the patient or individual. One key element of progress will be an absolute focus and buy-in by those involved in the management of the health service. No department or facet must be labelled untouchable, and no one should think that their sector cannot be improved. I am encouraged by the initial direction of the proposals, and I welcome the focus on care in the home environment. I would like the Minister to inform the House of his long-term visions in that regard.

Mr Beggs: The Member mentioned care in the home. I, too, support that, but I am concerned when I hear about vulnerable individuals who are at home with limited support from family and friends and who could perhaps end up getting two brief visits a day, one in the morning and one in the evening, to put them to bed. Does the Member accept that there has to be balance and that, for some, supportive housing, residential care or nursing care might be appropriate as well?

Mr Irwin: Yes, I probably agree. There will be different circumstances for different individuals.

We are all aware of the massive contribution made by carers across the country, and the argument is often made highlighting the benefits of caring in the home and the resources that that saves the Department, for instance. However, there is considerable need for greater recognition of carers, particularly in regard to support.

The Minister is correct when he states that we must make the best use of the resources available to us. That will obviously involve a great deal of inspection and planning to ensure that services are being delivered to the highest standards and care is being administered accurately. The public need to be able to see the system working with minimal disruption.

Locally, in my constituency, we have heard whispers of possible changes to the services currently offered at the Daisy Hill facility, and I welcome greater clarity on what changes are being proposed. Daisy Hill serves a growing population in the region, and I am keen to see services retained and, indeed, maximised.

I am encouraged by recent announcements on the relocation of services to Armagh city under the business service transformation project and the fact that 86 jobs will be located at the St Luke's Hospital site. That is in line with my council's vision of ensuring that Armagh remains a location for public sector employment, particularly in the health setting.

4.45 pm

Given the remit of the review, I welcome the scope for targeting how we, as a population, look after ourselves, or, as may be the case, do not look after ourselves. There is obviously a clear need for education in a number of areas, including the excessive consumption and pricing of alcohol and junk food. I know that we have seen some progress on tobacco control, but I believe that there is room for improvement in that area. Although the review focuses on a real attempt to make our health system perform better in every facet, it is important not to overlook what people can do for themselves to reduce the pressure on the health service. We need to start taking much better care of ourselves, and by doing so, we can prevent problems from occurring further down the line and reduce the pressures on the service.

I wish the Minister well in his task, and I trust that he will continue his work and maintain his enthusiasm for change. That will be key in carrying the process forward to what will, hopefully, be a successful conclusion.

Mrs D Kelly: I noticed that, in the preamble to the report, the terms of reference initially included the question of where hospitals and community care settings, etc, should be located. That particular hot potato was passed from the review team back to the Minister. Therefore, it is not entirely true that the Minister was prepared to take some of the difficult questions. If the review team had answered those for him, he would have been very pleased indeed. Nonetheless, 'Transforming Your Care' is a radical document.

Thus far, Members have focused on the acute hospital sector. However, if the system is to work and work well, adequate resources will need to go into the community and into social care in particular. It will also require cross-departmental working. For example, if all residential care homes or all the long-term institutions that provide care to people with learning disabilities were to close within the next five years, a lot of work by and support from the Department for Social Development would be required to support those affected. Furthermore, if the reablement priorities are to be achieved for those who have suffered illness or injury, the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), or wherever those functions will be, will also have a role to play. DEL currently plays a role in that area, but that will need to be enhanced. The community and voluntary sector will also need to be involved, as will the private sector. We all know that there are a lot of concerns about finances in the private sector. Corners are being cut, and many Members could tell stories from their constituents' viewpoints.

The health and social care budget in the Minister's Department has a shortfall of over £600 million over the next three years. Given that, he might give the House some indication at this stage of how he will manage and finance the changes. Dealing with that shortfall will be a challenge in itself, and I suggest that implementing the proposed changes will bring additional pressures. As some Members said, it is somewhat of a chicken-and-egg scenario, and there is a degree of scepticism.

I worked in the health service for 22 years, and when some of the statutory care homes were closed, for example, I often heard promises of money and change being made to the community. However, that money was never transferred to the community. The reference paper also suggests that GPs will take a lead in integrated care pathways. However, who will take the lead in those negotiations with GPs?

My colleague Dominic Bradley referred to the consultation on the review. The title of the document, 'Transforming

Your Care', suggests that the public will have a say in how that care will be transformed. I accept that, during the period of the review, the public had an opportunity to make submissions either as individuals or as members of organisations. However, those are not the same thing, and it will not capture the public's attention to the same extent as the closure of a local service. It seems that, at this stage, no consultation will be taken forward on that basis.

I wanted to refer to some other points about the Bamford review. We all know that there have been numerous documents; some members, including Mr Wells, referred to other healthcare papers that there was no political will to implement. The Bamford review was a radical document, but I suggest that it was not implemented not because of a lack of political will but because of a lack of finance. So how are all the new recommendations going to be taken forward?

Mr Wells: The Member may not be aware of the fact that the Minister will be bringing forward perhaps the largest piece of legislation that this Assembly will ever see, which will implement the Bamford review. That is coming along, and there will be more than ample opportunity to discuss that crucial issue. That will be delivered.

Mrs D Kelly: I welcome the fact that the legislation will implement the Bamford review, but we have yet to hear how the provision of care at the other end and the resources and the finances that will be required are going to be managed. I want the Minister to give us some indication of how that is going to happen.

In the brief time that I have left, I want to draw the Minister's attention to a particular issue. I understand that members of staff at trust and unit level throughout the service had the opportunity to put forward suggestions about how money might be saved. I speak to healthcare staff on a regular basis, and they have a lot of pragmatic and practical ideas, but some of those never seem to come up through the system. I will pass those suggestions on to the Minister later in private, given the time constraints.

The document is challenging. I welcome the proposals for end-of-life palliative care, the commitment to allow people to die with dignity in their own homes, and how nursing care is going to be used as part of palliative care —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member must bring her remarks to a close.

Mrs D Kelly: — to meet that particular objective.

Mr G Robinson: I am pleased to speak in this debate to welcome the proactive approach that the Minister has taken since his appointment. I thank the staff in the NHS for their dedicated service, and all the members of the review team, who have put in so much effort to deliver the report.

The Health Minister has one of the most difficult Executive portfolios, and I commend him for his approach to the many challenges that he has inherited. I also wish to use my time to highlight the integral role played by the Causeway Hospital in providing A&E services to a large geographical area in Northern Ireland. Having spoken on a number of occasions to the chairman of the Northern Health and Social Care Trust and senior clinicians about the A&E facilities that the Causeway Hospital provides, I am aware that it is a valued asset to the trust as well as to the population which it serves and who depend on it. I ask the Minister and his officials to do everything they can to ensure that that does not change.

Recent news reports have highlighted trolley waits and admission times in Antrim Area Hospital, with the Causeway Hospital and A&E working to full capacity. In my view, that proves the importance of the Causeway Hospital as a vital piece of our health infrastructure. Our population deserves a good service, and the truth is that it is being delivered, despite what the rumour mill would have us believe.

Many have welcomed the news in recent days that the Irish Open golf tournament is returning to the north coast, and have pointed to the number of visitors whom we expect to be attracted to that great event. That is just one event to add to those that annually benefit the north coast by attracting hundreds of thousands of people to the area. We have the North West 200 road race, the raft race and the air show. In forthcoming years, I believe, we will have more sporting events, and we must have A&E facilities and infrastructure to serve them. I appreciate that the Minister has a challenging budget, and that the Compton review will, doubtless, leave him with more challenging decisions to take. I ask that he does his very best to ensure that the north coast and the rural hinterland do not lose their prized A&E services.

Mr Kinahan: I am afraid that I have missed a great deal of what various Members have been saying today because of other commitments. I am not a member of the Health Committee, but, like all MLAs, I deal with health issues in many things that I do, whether in hospitals or in care homes, and it is on the latter issue that I wish to raise some concerns.

I can see where the Minister is going with trying to get more care done in the home, but it terrifies me that it is being done without necessarily looking at how it will work on the ground. In the osteoporosis debate before Christmas, we were given a statistic that 25% of the fractures that require hospital treatment happen in care homes. That was put to me in a way that suggested we should be concerned about care homes, but, if you turn that statistic round the other way, it means that 75% of fractures happen in the home.

In most homes, whether they have staircases or slippy floors, a mass of work needs to be done before they are suitable places for families to care for their own. If you are caring for your own, it is not just about the structure of the house, the skills are also important, and not every family is cosy, loving and works well. We should think of all the elderly people who may be left at home when someone has gone out to work and they cannot get hold of anyone. I have enormous concerns that we are forcing something on families that we should not be putting in place, yet each and every home will need to be studied. We need some mechanism to check what is going on and to check that the elderly are being looked after well in their homes.

Last week, I went to a care home in my patch and was incredibly impressed with what I saw. You should think of the skills of the nurses involved in looking after the elderly and the way the home is built and set up with the special bathing units, but, at the same time, there was happiness and companionship there. You do not necessarily get that at home. We want something to be put in place to allow them the choice. I also got a call the other day from someone

who felt that his mother had been turned down a place in a home just because that was the policy. I had to ring to check, and I got her into a home. I am sure that many of us have done things like that. However, we must not let the policy drive the right decision. It should be a case of making the right decision once you have looked at all the factors. Therefore, I am very concerned with where we are going. I understand it, but some very clever mechanism has to be put in place so that nobody is left at home in such a way that they are not being looked after, considering the worst things that could happen there.

As a novice of the health world, I will move on to another area: the pharmacy side of life. I do not understand where we are going with that at the moment. There have been cutbacks in pharmacies yet, at the same time, we are being told today that we will work better with the pharmacies in the future. I hope that the Department will listen to the ways of all the pharmacies and use their skills so that we have a better health service. One pharmacist told me that, each week, about £400 of drugs was returned to the pharmacy. Although some are being returned, many wasted drugs are probably being binned at home. A mass of money can be saved, and I know that the Minister knows that. However, my concern is that we have grand and expensive strategies, such as the one suggested by Compton, and are trying to put them in place without listening to the people on the ground who know about the issues. Or are we? We need a more dynamic system for talking to and learning from the people on the ground.

Various people have raised the example of the appalling trolley waits at Antrim Area Hospital. However, I wonder how many people have spoken to and listened to the nurses there. They are not allowed to speak out, yet the problem is happening every Friday or Thursday when too many people are coming in. We need to find a more dynamic way of listening to the people who are skilled and coming up with the right solution. I am concerned that we have a little bit of an ivory tower situation here, and I hope that the Minister will look at that because I want our care homes to work but I also want a Northern Ireland in which everybody has a better health service. I know that the Minister will try to get us there.

Mr Wells: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I think that history has been made this afternoon. I want to put it on the record for posterity that I believe that Mr Kinahan is the first MLA in the Chamber to read his speech entirely from an iPad. Technology is moving on, and I congratulate him. He is very clever, and I think that that is the trend for the future.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Despite the new technology, Mr Wells, that is not a point of order. However, you have made your point.

5.00 pm

Mr Allister: There is no doubt that the Compton report is a serious piece of work, addressing many serious issues. However, I do not subscribe to the Jim Wells school of thinking that, because it comes from John Compton, it deserves, in some way, less critical examination. I am not suggesting for one moment that Mr Compton is a gun for hire, but I am tempted to remember that, around this time last year, when he was defending the previous Minister and going into battle in defence of the proposition that the health service might be facing bankruptcy, one of the voices that I heard on the radio disputing that and contradicting him was that of Mr Jim Wells. Today, of course, he rides the Compton bandwagon and pushes that agenda in a speech that demonstrates that he has the credentials to be the future slash-and-burn Health Minister and that he is wedded to all that is necessary in that regard.

In five minutes, some of which I have frittered away already, one cannot hope to address all of the many issues in the report that deserve to be addressed, so I will focus on one: the provision of acute health services as it affects my constituency. Causeway Hospital is the focus of that, and it was provided at a time when we were assured that it was an ample replacement for the Route Hospital. We were assured that it would be an abiding presence in that area and that it would serve that area. It made excellent provision, and, over the years, it has demonstrated good use of its modern facilities. Indeed, it has well met a regional need in that regard. However, it is now plain to anyone who cares to look that, sadly, the Minister and his party intend to downgrade the Causeway.

Of course, when hospital downgrades are on the way, one is never upfront about them. If you are the Minister or the Department, you usually use some sleight of hand to produce closure. It is always clouded in deliberate ambiguity. Take the City Hospital's A&E department, which, we were told, would be only a temporary closure. Everyone knows that it is not just a temporary closure. Take the Causeway as far back as 2009. We had the first signs, with the closure and removal of the microbiology laboratory from Coleraine to Antrim. At the time, I warned that that was a forerunner to the ultimate downgrading of acute services.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way. Does the Member think that the DUP's plan for the area will gag the North Antrim MP?

Mr Allister: I would be the last person to speak for the MP for North Antrim, but I notice that the plan has tempered the interventions of the North Antrim MLAs in today's debate. The only one of those who has deigned to speak is Mr Storey and his speech was not one of nailing colours to the mast but of preparing a soft landing for the downgrading of the Causeway. We noted that.

Over the years at the Causeway, clinical posts were left unfilled, and there was a heavy reliance on locums. The official excuse began to evolve of the inability to find suitable staff. That feeds into the master plan to downgrade the Causeway, and, on cue, along comes the Compton review, about which the Minister will not even consult but which is handed down as a done deal with only the detail left for discussion. Such detail includes whether there will be five or seven acute hospitals. Be it five or seven, one thing is clear: Causeway is not envisaged by the Department as being one of them. Denuding the north-east of the Province of acute hospital services may be a small thing to the Minister, but it is a very big deal for the people of north Antrim and of east Londonderry that he intends to rob them of their existing level of acute provision.

It will not wash to say: "Oh, you will have a better service elsewhere". Elsewhere cannot cope. We saw that last weekend, in Antrim, with the overflow of trolley use and the cancellation of some of the following week's hospital

operations in order to get beds. So, it cannot be coped with elsewhere, and that is not something that people should be persuaded about.

When it comes to hospital closures and downgrades, the touchstone is how many acute beds we have at present. How many will we have after the event?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member should draw his remarks to a close, please.

Mr Allister: It seems quite clear to me that, when you look at the cumulative provision for the north-east of the Province, we will have many fewer acute beds after —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up, please.

Mr Allister: — the Minister and his party get their way in respect of the Causeway than we have at the moment. Thank you.

Mr McClarty: I suggest that we should have a small clinic in this place to deal with Mr Wells's dizziness as a result of his somersaults since this time last year. I also point out that I am the second person to do their speech from an iPad, but in my case the "i" stands for ink.

First, I congratulate the Minister, his Department and the review team on initiating the review of health and social care. Striving for better quality and more efficient health and social care should always be a priority for this legislature. The review is a positive first step of many towards ensuring that. The current system is largely failing, as we all know. Services and staff are severely under pressure and patients are experiencing horrendous waiting times and treatment cancellations. The Compton report addresses those issues and suggests proposals, within the constraints of the Department. Although not all the proposed changes are desirable, overall, change is necessary to improve health and social care in Northern Ireland.

As we all know, point of access to services is a significant problem in the current system of health and social care in Northern Ireland. A&E departments are overstretched because patients are using those services when, for example, GP out-of-hours services would be much more appropriate. Indeed, a trip to a local pharmacy would suffice instead of a costly visit to a GP. As the report suggests, we need to maximise the expertise of alternative services and educate the population about where they can easily access the appropriate care. Pharmacists are particularly underutilised in Northern Ireland. Rather than imposing severe cuts, we should make use of the talented pool of pharmacists who have been produced by the two universities here. Indeed, schemes already exist where pharmacists administer flu jabs, advise on minor ailments, conduct smoking cessation classes, provide weight-loss counselling and so on. Take pressure off GPs by advocating services that pharmacists are more than qualified to administer. I appreciate that the road to achieving that will be long, but we need to maximise the resources that we already possess to get the best value for money, which is the essence of this review.

There is considerable uncertainty in my constituency with regard to acute services at Causeway. Although the report was careful not to mention specific hospitals, the likely proposal to close half of the 10 acute services has inevitably caused concern and fear, not only in my constituency but throughout the areas in Northern Ireland where we have A&E services. It is important that the Minister publicly discloses the position soon to alleviate that uncertainty among the general public and staff, again, not only in my constituency but across the board. He must also clarify the situation with regard to adequate staffing and opening hours in those A&E units that will remain open. This is not just an economic issue; it is about efficiency and quality of care.

Although each hospital will have legitimate reasons to maintain acute services, I represent the Causeway area. The Causeway Hospital is positioned in the heart of Northern Ireland's premier tourist area. The population almost doubles during the summer months, which increases the opportunity for accidents and emergencies. Causeway is central in providing quick access to acute services, particularly for those relying on public transport — obviously tourists.

The north coast is host to major sporting events, as has already been pointed out; I do not have to go over them again. All those sporting events are a credit to my constituency, but, unfortunately, all of them come with risk, both in the sports and for those who watch them. It is almost ridiculous to suggest that acute services will not be available close by.

I apologise to the Minister for not being able to stay for his response as I have another meeting to go to in this Building; however, I will read his response tomorrow morning. I reiterate my plea to the Minister to consider carefully and to consider soon.

Mr Poots: I will try to respond to all Members, but I may not be successful. The Chairperson of the Committee, Ms Gildernew, urged caution on the implementation of all the recommendations, advising that, in her view, there were some that should not be implemented, so I will be listening intently to hear what they are. Everyone who spoke stated repeatedly that change is required; I, too, have said that many times. I have received the report from the review team, and its conclusions and the broad direction that it sets are very much about change. We are committed to taking things forward on the basis of change.

I noted John McCallister's arguments that the review has to do with money and that the service is underfunded. We heard a lot from John McCallister and his colleagues around this time last year. We were, apparently, entering chapter 11 administration shortly into the new financial year; we were, according to John McCallister and colleagues, going to have 4,000 compulsory redundancies in the health service. Of course, those things have not happened. We have to learn to live within our means and to spend money more wisely, as opposed to looking constantly for more money and subsequently wasting it, as some people seem to recommend.

Mark Durkan expressed his concerns about the implications for staff. I will seek to ensure that all staff are treated with respect at all times, that they are made aware of issues at an early stage and that they are properly consulted. Many staff will see no particular change in their area, but some will, and it is important that we work with them on those changes. Many of the changes will not be particularly negative; nonetheless, they will be changes and they will have implications.

Michaela Boyle stated that GPs are critical to the delivery of our services, and that is the case. Some things happened in the past that perhaps undermined GPs' work. The review, however, suggests an indicative reallocation of £21 million to design the way forward within clear parameters rather than having a top-down approach to specifying a function for each hospital. All the current hospitals will have an integral role in the delivery of services to their localities. The review is not prescriptive about the service configuration in those facilities, but it does set out its expectations of what should be included and what a major acute hospital must be capable of sustaining.

In response to Margaret Ritchie, there is nothing wrong with being local. I pass comment on Ms Ritchie's making the local case, and there is nothing wrong with that. She can be a bit local on occasions. The patient is the most important in all that we do in the health and social care sector. I want to explore means of enhancing their experience. That does not just mean their treatment or even their aftercare but every aspect of how the service interacts with the people that we care for. I want to give patients choice. What really matters to patients is the design and delivery of a service that meets their needs and expectations. Patients want to be treated for non-urgent care at a time and place that is convenient for them; ideally, that is close to their home and in their community. I want to enhance patients' experience. Therefore, we need to explore how we can make services more responsive to patients' everyday lives.

5.15 pm

Ms Ritchie: Clearly, the Minister supports local accessibility at the point of delivery.

Mr Poots: Absolutely. We support local accessibility, but that does not mean that every service will be delivered locally. Many will be delivered better and more professionally by specialist teams, but specialist teams will not be available in every local hospital across Northern Ireland. There needs to be recognition of that and a mature discussion of the issues.

Jimmy Spratt highlighted the role of GP practices in helping patients to manage diabetes. We need to help to build on the role played by GPs, specialist nurses and allied health professionals in primary care to manage and treat patients with diabetes and other chronic illnesses. The report recognises this, specifically through the new model that it proposes for long-term conditions. The report has considerable recommendations on diabetes.

Jim Wells encouraged us all to be brave. Thank you for that, Mr Wells. I look forward to seeing courageous Members in the days and months ahead. I will try to give some leadership on the issue, but I am not sure whether there will be much "followership". We will just have to wait and see.

Mr Wells referred to residential accommodation. The future model makes it clear that the residential homes envisaged for people in the future will be their own homes. Mr Bradley and others suggested that people would perhaps prefer to be in residential or nursing homes. I do not know any older person who really desires to move out of their own home and into residential or nursing homes, if the proper care package can be put in place. Perhaps they do exist, but I have not met them as yet.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for giving way. He has very mischievously misrepresented Mr Bradley and others. No one said that they wanted to see people put into residential care, whether that is statutory or private sector care. They asked how the people who currently live in residential statutory care homes that, under the review's proposals, are scheduled for closure within five years will be treated.

Mr Poots: The problem that Members will have with residential homes is that, over time, new residents will not be coming into them. They will, therefore, become unsustainable, and that will have to be managed. The facilities can be used for the purposes of respite care. When the numbers of long-term residents are very low, there will be an opportunity to make those decisions while enabling people to stay in their own homes with the right care packages. I am not sure whether some Members — Mr Beggs, in particular — had actually read the report as far as the revision of care is concerned. Had he done so, he would have identified its proposals for how we can better manage care, ensure that elderly people can stay in their own homes, and provide appropriate care in their own homes.

Anna Lo and other Members said that the success of the review will be evident in improved patient care and better outcomes. In particular, I anticipate the benefits to be: enhanced overall patient experience; improved productivity and efficiency of health and social care; the promotion of greater involvement of front line professionals in decision-making and service development; the community and voluntary sector to be enabled to provide services; and the HSC to be assisted in finding solutions to complex issues. I also believe that we can support preventative and early intervention measures, reduce unnecessary hospital admissions, enhance local commissioning and enable the health and social care system to contribute to the economic prosperity of Northern Ireland.

Sandra Overend raised the issue of finance, which I dealt with in response to Mr McCallister. She also mentioned Antrim Area Hospital. Of course, the scenario for the current problems in Antrim Hospital was the simultaneous closures of Mid-Ulster Hospital and Whiteabbey Hospital. I am not sure that the Minister had advice that he should close both those facilities at the one time. I suspect that it was not the case, and that has led to the current problems in Antrim Area Hospital. Members should be aware that there is an intention to build a new accident and emergency facility, and work on that will start very soon. I hope that it will be commissioned for service later next year.

Mr Storey, Mr Robinson, Mr Allister, Mr McClarty and others raised the issue of the Causeway Hospital. Mr Brady, Mr Irwin, Mr Bradley, Mr Wells and maybe a couple of other Members raised the issue of the Daisy Hill Hospital. The report concludes that local populations and, in particular, professionals should design the way forward within clear parameters rather than taking a top-down approach of specifying a function for each hospital. All existing hospitals will have an integral role in the delivery of services to their localities. The report is not prescriptive about service configuration in those facilities, but it sets out expectations of what should be included and what a major acute hospital must be capable of sustaining. It concludes that there will be changes on all sites over a five-year period.

I am sure that the community in Coleraine will be greatly heartened by Mr Allister's prediction of the demise of the Causeway Hospital, because he seldom gets it right. Therefore, when Mr Allister predicts that something is to close, it has a much greater likelihood of staying open. I suppose that he may get it right on some occasion, so if he keeps at it, he may create such an opportunity.

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Poots: Providing that the intervention is brief.

Mr Allister: Perhaps the Minister will do me the courtesy of referring to what I said. I forecast downgrading, not closure — there is a distinction. The Minister has downgrading in mind, and the concern of my constituents is the extent of that.

Mr Poots: What is important is that all hospitals provide care appropriate to the people who come into them and that all those facilities are safe and sustainable. I do not wish the South Down, North Antrim or East Londonderry constituencies to have a poorer level of service than any other part of Northern Ireland. I do not want people to be using facilities that will provide a poorer service. That is not currently the case, and it is not my intention that it will be the case.

Some of these things can, on occasion, be taken out of politicians' hands. Very often, the easy option can be to allow that to happen. We saw it happen, for example, with regard to the Dungannon hospital and other hospitals, when decisions were taken overnight by the royal colleges. I do not want us to be in that situation. I would much prefer that we had the appropriate discussions with communities about the services provided and that we provided those appropriate services.

Mr Kinahan referred to care homes and consultation. I can assure the Member that considerable consultation took place. In fact, workshops were attended by 150 clinicians; household surveys across Northern Ireland covered over a thousand people; there was an extensive range of meetings with staff representatives, health and social care trusts and independent voluntary sector bodies; public meetings took place; and an online survey was taken. Over 3,000 people were engaged in the process. A considerable amount of work has been done in seeking to ensure that as many people as possible were consulted.

Mr McCrea raised the issue of the Mid-Ulster Hospital. I think that the report can lead to a better future for it than has been the case heretofore. We can move to looking at the services that the hospital provides to see how we can do better, as opposed to what I inherited. I hope to leave that circumstance better in the future.

Mr Irwin also referred to care in the home. Mrs Kelly raised the issue of finance, and I should make it very clear that we have a number of things to ensure in that regard. We will require around £70 million of funding over the next three years: £25 million in each of the first two years and £20 million in the third. Thereafter, we will derive savings from that. I will raise that matter with my colleague Mr Wilson and see if assistance is available to help us achieve that.

Through our commissioning plans, we are also looking at what further action is needed in all parts of health and social care to deliver the savings that are required by the Budget. Work is in hand to ensure that we deliver cost savings of at least 4% in 2012-13 to balance the cash budget and to absorb the ever-growing demands in services. It is also our intention to move funding from hospitals towards primary care. That has been made very clear in the report, and we believe that the form will follow the money, because that has been the experience before.

All in all, we are in a difficult period with regard to our health service provision. There are many challenges. There is an older population and many chronic illnesses. We, therefore, need to respond to all of that within the financial constraints that have been imposed upon us by the colleagues of the Ulster Unionist Party, many of whom stood for the Conservatives over at Westminster.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Please draw your remarks to a close.

Mr Poots: We live within those constraints. I recommend the report to the House; I think that it is the way forward.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly takes note of the review of health and social care in Northern Ireland published on 13 December 2011.*

Adjourned at 5.26 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 17 January 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Point of Order

Mr Elliott: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Last Tuesday, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister released a statement referring to additional funding to alleviate pressures on school budgets. On Thursday, the Minister of Education issued a press release that claimed that funding of £120 million had been agreed by the Executive for his Department and would be available over the next three years. Is it in order for a Minister to issue such an announcement before the Minister of Finance and Personnel has had an opportunity to make a statement to the House? Will you investigate the matter, Mr Speaker? I know that you have had concerns about that being done in the past.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for his point of order. I will look at the issue and come back to the Member individually or to the House, as I am not around the whole detail at present.

Mr McDevitt: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker, it was indicated at the time in the press that the Minister of Education intended to make a statement to the House on the proposed £120 million allocation. Will you inform the House whether you have received any notice from the Minister of Education of his intention to make such a statement?

Mr Speaker: I am conscious of a number of issues to do with this and am aware that the House did not meet last week to discuss any of those issues. As Members know, we often hear rumours about Ministers coming to the House to make statements. As I have continually said in the House, it is really up to individual Ministers as to what statements they bring to the House. I have always encouraged Ministers to judge for themselves but to inform the House first on important matters. I know that there will be occasions when Ministers will have to release a brief statement to the House on a particular issue and then come back to the House with a fuller statement. Let me look at all those issues.

I say again that I have very little authority around the issue of getting Ministers to the House to make statements. As I say, there will be occasions on which Ministers will have to release information to the press. We should try to understand that, given the nature of the subject matter that needs to be released to the press. Let me look at the issue and come back to the House.

Ministerial Statements

Public Expenditure: January Monitoring Round

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Minister of Finance and Personnel that he wishes to make a statement to the House this morning.

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Thank you for the opportunity to present the outcome of the January monitoring round to the Assembly. This is the last monitoring round of the financial year and is, therefore, strategically important in influencing the end-of-year outcome and in setting the opening position for the forthcoming financial year. That is particularly important this year, because we are now operating within the framework of the Budget exchange scheme that I agreed with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury last July. I will say more about that shortly, but, first, I want to look at the financial position as presented to the Executive in this monitoring round.

When the 2011 Budget was initially set for this financial year, back in March 2011, there was an expectation that it would be a very tight settlement, with little expectation of material reduced requirements being declared during the course of the year. However, the evidence to date suggests otherwise. Although that may reflect robust action taken by Departments to contain expenditure, through, for example, the delivery of efficiencies, it raises the possibility that the original Budget allocations to some Departments either reflected an overly pessimistic view of need or underestimated the capacity within Departments to pursue and deliver savings. There is encouraging evidence to suggest that efficiencies are being driven out. For example, the pace of reduction in administration spending is increasing. In the October monitoring round, I reported that administrative expenditure had fallen by 2·5% since the Budget was set. The January monitoring position shows that the spend on administration is now 3·8% lower than planned. Although that is encouraging, I have now asked my officials to undertake an analysis of the current financial position of Departments and compare that with the original Budget allocations. Such analysis is timely, given that the Executive have now launched the draft Programme for Government (PFG). It will provide the Executive with an opportunity to review departmental allocations for 2013-14 and 2014-15 in light of the PFG priorities.

I now turn to the specific issues in this monitoring round. The Executive started the round with an overcommitment from the October monitoring round of £11·5 million in respect of non-ring-fenced resource expenditure and £23·8

million with regard to capital investment. Members will note that the focus on non-ring-fenced resource expenditure items introduced in the October monitoring round has continued. The ring-fenced position is provided in the tables I have included for information. As I have explained to the Assembly before, the Executive have no discretion to move resources out of the ring-fenced category. As I said, there were significant reduced requirements again declared in this monitoring round. Departments surrendered £33 million of non-ring-fenced resource expenditure and £23·9 million in respect of capital investment. Details of those reduced requirements are included in the tables.

One significant item within the reduced requirements related to the schools end-of-year flexibility scheme. In June, the Department of Education (DE) was allocated £20·5 million to cover the estimated 2011-12 net schools drawdown for this year. However, the Department has confirmed that the final estimated drawdown is only £10 million, which means that there was a surrender of £10·5 million in this monitoring round. I am obviously disappointed that DE has surrendered such a large amount of resource, and I have asked my officials to liaise with their colleagues in that Department on improving their forecasting next year. The schools end-year flexibility stock will now be reduced by £10 million, which is the total net amount drawn down this year. That will set the opening position for next year.

In addition to reduced requirements, there were a number of "centre" issues that impacted on the amount of additional resources available in this monitoring round. In total, those centre issues resulted in an additional £21·3 million of non-ring-fenced resource expenditure being made available in this round. However, on the capital investment side, the net effect was a £1·1 million pressure.

The most significant issue was additional Barnett consequentials received in this financial year. On the capital investment side, those Barnett additions were offset by the Executive's decision to explicitly build into its planning assumptions the progress made by the asset management unit towards its goal of £10 million in additional capital receipts. The asset management unit advises that it has delivered £1·3 million of additional asset sales to date and that, although further asset sales may be realised in this financial year, there is a high degree of uncertainty. The Executive, therefore, decided to explicitly recognise the £8·3 million capital pressure in its deliberations.

I now turn to the issue of internal reallocations and reclassifications. The public expenditure control framework provides each Department with considerable scope to address emerging pressures within its existing allocations on a unilateral basis. However, any proposals to move resources across spending areas in excess of the de minimis threshold of £1 million are subject to the Executive's approval. There may also be departmental allocations that, for technical reasons, were incorrectly classified. All proposed reclassifications require the Executive's approval. All proactive movements and reclassifications agreed by the Executive have also been included in the tables that accompany Members' copies of this statement.

With regard to the resources that were available, the starting level of overcommitment, the level of reduced requirements, the "centre" items and the internal reallocations and classifications all impacted on the amount of resources available for allocation in this monitoring round. The net impact of all those issues was that the Executive had £44·3 million of non-ring-fenced resource expenditure available for allocation. However, a capital investment pressure of £1·2 million remained.

The bids by Departments for additional resources amounted to £20·6 million of non-ring-fenced resource expenditure and £11·4 million of capital investment. The individual bids by Departments are shown in the tables.

The level of resources available on the resource expenditure side exceeded the amount of bids, whereas on the capital investment side the opposite was the case. Therefore, in order to meet the capital investment bids and exit the monitoring round with zero overcommitment of capital, the Executive agreed to reclassify £12·6 million from resource expenditure to capital investment. The reclassification from resource expenditure to capital investment allowed the Executive to agree allocations on the resource expenditure and capital investment sides. That buoyant position meant that all bids were met. The agreed allocations are shown in the tables, and I will highlight a few of the main ones.

The Department for Regional Development (DRD) was allocated £10 million, which will allow for further maintenance and repair of our major and minor roads as well as the purchase of 13 new buses to run on those roads. That is good news for the construction industry, because it means that spend on roads maintenance this year will be £111 million. That is the highest allocation ever recorded for roads maintenance and illustrates the Executive's commitment to dealing with some of the issues around jobs and so on that the construction industry has brought to us.

10.45 am

A total of £8·2 million was allocated to the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL). The bulk of that additional funding will go to the Steps to Work employment programme, which has seen increasing demand in the current difficult economic climate. That additional allocation will ensure that our employment service is fully funded to assist unemployed people back into work. Funding was also provided for the Step Ahead programme, which offers participants a job for up to 10 weeks in the community and voluntary sector. The funding now provided will allow DEL to support 500 participants through the programme.

There was also a £2 million allocation to the Department for Social Development (DSD), which will deliver thermal improvements to a further 900 Housing Executive homes in this financial year. That will create further opportunities in the construction sector and help to deal with fuel poverty, an issue that a number of Members have raised in the Assembly on a number on occasions.

The Executive now leave this monitoring round with £11·2 million of remaining non-ring-fenced resource to put towards our carry-over into next year, and Members will be glad to hear that it will not be surrendered to the Treasury. Our proactive management of the Budget position also means that there is now no capital expenditure overcommitment, while any further capital underspends that emerge over the next few months will also be carried into next year.

Therefore, the Executive leave this monitoring round having met all bids and with some unallocated resources, which will be added to whatever residual underspends emerge at the provisional out-turn stage. That can be carried into the 2012-13 financial year under the Budget exchange scheme. The scheme allows the Executive to carry forward £50 million of non-ring-fenced resource expenditure and £13 million of capital expenditure, and we are aiming to maximise, although not go over, those limits. To go over those limits would mean that we would lose the money to the Treasury.

Moving into next year, what we do with those resources and the additional Barnett allocations resulting from the Chancellor's autumn statement is strategically important. Rather than wait until emerging bids appear in the June monitoring round, I believe that we can take some early decisions that will allow for better planning and delivery of key services and give certainty to those who have to deliver the key services.

The Executive are acutely aware of the particularly difficult circumstances in the education and health sectors. Those circumstances are driven largely by the combined effects of demographic change and the need to deliver the ongoing strategic programme of transformational change. The problems over reform in the schools sector particularly worry me. I recently met the Minister of Education, the First Minister and the deputy First Minister to discuss those issues. It was a very constructive meeting, and we agreed an additional package of assistance that will be rolled out over the next three years.

The package will be factored into the wider Budget review process. In the light of a need for some urgent action, however, the Executive agreed that we now allocate a further £30 million resource to the Department of Education budget for 2012. That has enabled the Minister of Education to inform schools that the reduction in their budget will be 3% next year, which will enable them to do immediate planning for dealing with that reduction.

The concerns over the health sector are mainly, although not entirely, on the capital side. I proposed to the Executive that those pressures be addressed as part of the wider review of budgets assessment. I also intend to take account of the health capital pressures in an emerging paper that I will present to Executive colleagues. The paper will set out the conclusions of the wider review of the capital position following recent developments, especially the decision by the Irish Government not to make money available for the A5.

I look forward to updating the House on the outcome of the budget reviews. I hope that the Assembly will welcome this statement. I believe that the picture is much more optimistic than it perhaps was at the beginning of the year, when we discussed the Budget position. I am happy to take questions.

Mr Murphy (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for his statement. He said that he has instructed his officials to compare Departments' current financial position with the original Budget allocations and that the Executive will have an opportunity to review Budget allocations in the light of the Programme for Government priorities. Is that, in effect, a reconsideration or a reopening of the third and fourth years of the Budget? If so, will he give an indication of the timescales for that process and ensure that the Assembly and its Committees are fully involved and engaged in it?

What is the Minister's assessment of the reasons for the high level of reduced requirements at this late stage in the year? Will he assure us that that is due more to good financial management than to bad budget-setting for the current year, in that Departments overestimated what they could have spent?

Mr Wilson: I will deal first with the review of the allocations that have been made in the four-year Budget that we set. We believed that having a four-year Budget was the right thing to do, and Departments made their bids. There have been substantial returns this year from some Departments in particular. We intend to look at the starting position this year and at the provisional out-turn position at the end of this year. We have to look at the past two years, because the provisional out-turn would not be known in time to make reallocations for the next financial year, so we have to have a year's space in between.

It is not a reopening of the Budget whereby we look at its fundamentals. We already have the Programme for Government; we know what Departments are doing. We are looking at the margins and seeing whether all the allocations are correct. If they are not, it would be far better to make adjustments now so that we can plan spending and give certainty to the delivery of services in year 3 and year 4. Essentially, that is what we are doing. I emphasise that it is not a reopening of the Budget through which Departments will bid for fundamental change. We have a draft Programme for Government and a strategic way forward. We know that, after one year, there have been differences at the margins that we had not anticipated. We now want to look at that money and allocate it to where we have identified pressures.

As for the reasons for the return of money, as I said in the statement, some Departments have already made substantial savings of 3·8% in their administrative costs. At the time of the Budget last year, I emphasised that, in a tight budgetary situation, we should look at how we can take money out of services that are not front line so that it goes to front line services. Some Departments have been good at that. We often had discussions about whether there were things that Departments did that they did not need to do. Of course, everybody said that they had to do all the things that they said. I think that some Departments looked at some of the things that they were doing and asked whether they really needed to do them, and they stopped doing them.

Of course, there have been particular pressures. In the case of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), for example, firms are finding it difficult to get match finance from banks. That of course means that they cannot draw down grants or do not have confidence for the future, which then means that they delay investment decisions. That has meant that there have been substantial returns from DETI in this year. It remains to be seen what happens in future years. So, there are particular reasons for that in some Departments, but, by and large, I am pleased that Departments are managing their budgets better than they were in the past.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his statement this morning. What progress has the performance and efficiency delivery unit (PEDU) made in the Department of Education's work programme?

Mr Wilson: Some Ministers were very reluctant to have PEDU look at their Department's performance, efficiency and delivery and how it could be improved. Indeed, I had many a battle with Ministers about PEDU going in to look at such work. I must say that I am pleased with PEDU's work in the Department of Education, where it identified scope for considerable savings. Off the top of my head, we are talking about nearly £20 million of potential savings in just two areas: school transport and school meals.

I had a meeting yesterday afternoon with the Minister of Education, during which we went through the PEDU report. At the end of the day, this is not about the Department of Finance and Personnel placing an imposition on other Departments. It is about the Department of Finance and Personnel working with Ministers and Departments. The Minister responsible for the Department concerned has to take ownership of the report — it has to become his or her report — and he or she then has to implement the recommendations.

I was very pleased that the Minister accepted all PEDU's recommendations, and he intends to put in place a work programme to deliver on those. He is quite happy for PEDU to continue monitoring what is being delivered. I think that that is the way forward. Rather than Ministers being suspicious of PEDU coming in and looking at their Department, they should see it as a resource to help them to manage their budget more effectively.

Mr Cree: I also thank the Minister for his statement. He referred to the fact that the Department of Education asked for £20·5 million in July and that, six months later, £10 million is not required. Is the Minister concerned that the Department's forecasting was so inaccurate in such a short space of time?

Mr Wilson: I am not concerned that its forecasting was so inaccurate. However, I am concerned that it did not identify at an earlier stage exactly how much schools would draw down. Let me just explain what happened. The end-year flexibility arrangements were lost after the coalition Government decided that money could not be carried forward on a year-to-year basis. Schools had saved about £57 million and were afraid that they were going to lose all of that; some of them were spending in the wildest possible ways. So, the then Minister of Education and I came to an arrangement whereby we would carry the money at the centre and the schools could then bid for that in June, thereby allowing them to spend in a much more sensible manner. Whatever money they asked for would be made available to them. All the Department had to do was to forecast how much it thought would be required.

The Department of Education drew down the £20·5 million. However, schools decided that they would rather keep half of that money as savings rather than spend it all in this financial year. That is what I want my officials to work on with the Department of Education. I would like the Department to have found out at an earlier stage how much schools intended to spend this year and to have returned any remaining money in September rather than in January. I suppose the trick in future years will be to get those indications earlier. I think that it was left a bit late this year. It is not the case that the money is not needed. Rather, schools have decided, maybe because they have a tighter budget next year, that they want to carry that forward to next year. I, therefore, want education officials to identify at an early stage whether schools are going to use the money this year and, if they are not going to do so, I want them to get it back so that it is available when it really is needed.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas a rinne sé ar maidin. The Minister referred to the ending of the end-year flexibility scheme last year and the consternation that that caused. Many Members brought pressure to bear in order to get the scheme replaced, and I welcomed the replacement at the time. However, it is disappointing — I know that the Minister shares my disappointment — that £10 million of that resource has now been returned.

Does the Minister agree that the money is a mixture of resource and capital? At a time when school budgets are under pressure, it is scandalous that an amount of that magnitude is being returned to the centre, especially given the fact that —

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to come to his question.

11.00 am

Mr D Bradley: OK, Mr Speaker. It is scandalous, especially given the fact that many teachers are now being placed on protective notice.

Mr Wilson: I am amazed that the Member, who has been a very good member of the Committee for Education for many years, seems to have such a shallow understanding of what that is all about. It is money that schools have saved. They got it in their budgets. They had the option to save some of their budget or to spend it fully. The Member will know full well why some schools decide to put money aside. Perhaps they want to paint the school, but, because they do not have enough money in the budget for one year, they set aside a little each year until they have enough. Perhaps they want to replace computers, play equipment or whatever. The fact that schools did not draw down that money this year does not mean that it has been lost to education; it simply means that schools have held onto it so that they can spend it when they assess that they need it. I would have thought that that was good, prudent management in schools. My only complaint is that I wish that the Department of Education had identified earlier in the year whether schools intended to draw down that money this year or keep it until next year so that the money would have been available earlier and might have been allocated to bids that were made in, say, September. That is my only complaint.

Let me emphasise that the money is not lost. It allows schools the flexibility and the ability to determine when they want to spend their own money. We have put the scheme in place. I should also point out — just in case the Member wants to take credit for it — that the arrangement was actually devised by the Minister of Education and me long before pressure came from the Assembly. As soon as the problem was identified, my officials, Department of Education officials, the Minister of Education and I got together and sorted the problem out. We did not need to be pressurised to do that.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for his statement. I welcome the money that has been allocated to DRD and DSD, which will surely be a much-needed boost for the construction industry. I also welcome the extra resource allocation to the Department of Education, which will be a relief to principals and boards of governors, who have struggled to find ways to reduce costs for the incoming year. Given the Minister's evident commitment to the Department of Education, can he tell me whether, if more capital underspend emerges, consideration will be given to school capital projects, such as the rebuild of Strandtown Primary School in east Belfast, which had plans approved and was found to be compliant with the capital build programme but did not have any money?

Mr Wilson: First, as I said, we will review the capital budget, especially in light of the fact that money for the A5 has not been made available from the Government of the Irish Republic. There will have to be a reallocation of money. We also have capital Barnett consequentials of £150 million — I think it is £150 million or £130 million — over the next three years, which will have to be allocated. I hope to bring a statement to the Assembly in the near future. We will have to apply a number of criteria. One criterion will be whether the money can be spent in time, as we cannot carry it over in substantial amounts from one year to the next. We can carry over only £11·5 million from one year to the next. Therefore, it will have to be allocated to projects that are ready to go.

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

Secondly, there will be all kinds of bids from Departments as to what capital is required. As I said in relation to the Health Department, one way in which we will judge capital bids will be whether they actually help with the reform programme. Obviously, in the case of education, there is a rationalisation programme. If the Department of Education makes strong bids on the basis that they are a way to deliver longer-term savings and better services, of course those bids will be considered. However, priorities within those allocations as to which schools will get the money will be for the Minister of Education to decide on, not me.

Mr Humphrey: I, too, thank the Minister for his statement to the House. I share his concerns and worries about education reform, as do many on these Benches. I welcome the resource being put into education. I am a governor in two schools in the greater Shankill area, including Springhill Primary School, which is urgently in need of a newbuild, and I would like to know how the Minister proposes to find the additional £30 million for the Department of Education in 2012-13.

Mr Wilson: I have already pointed out to the Assembly that, over the next three years, a stream of money is being made available for additional resource spending from Barnett consequentials; in other words, spending decisions have been made by the Government at Westminster, and a certain percentage of that additional spending will then come to Northern Ireland. Therefore, we know that we have a flow of capital and resource from that over the next number of years. Next year, it is around £20 million — I should remember the exact figure, but I cannot — and we will have money that we will carry over under the Budget exchange system. With the provisional out-turn figures, we are hoping that that will be maximised at £50 million. Therefore, immediately, there is a pot of money available to spend next year, and we know that we have that.

I have no doubt that there will also be returns and reduced requirements in the monitoring rounds. From all of that, we should easily be able to meet requirements. That is why I have been able to give the commitment to the Minister of Education that the £30 million that he requires next year to keep the reduction in the schools budgets to 3% rather than the planned 5% will be available. That is where the money will come from.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas seo. Given the further handing back of funding by Invest NI, primarily because of the inability of businesses to get finance, will the Minister provide the House with an update on any progress he has made in putting pressure on the banks to ease up their criteria for lending capital to businesses?

Mr Wilson: I have regular meetings with the banks. They always assure me that their doors are open for business and they are lending, but that is not the evidence that I get back from businesses. Every day, I get evidence and hear stories from businesses that have strong trading positions and need more working capital to expand their business but cannot get money from the banks. Therefore, we have to keep pressure on the banks. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment also looked at what her Department may do where banks fail to make that money available. Although I do not have all the details, she announced £50 million for the loan guarantee scheme, and that is an additional source of finance that firms can apply to. However, let me make it clear that that will not be a substitute for proper bank lending.

I have had conversations with the governor of the Bank of England and with Treasury Ministers in London. I know that the Government have set targets for the lending that they require and want banks to make to small businesses, but there are no regional targets. We have been pushing to get some regional targets, but one thing we can do is get the Treasury to put pressure on banks to make sure that some of the money and the requirement to lend to small businesses percolates down to Northern Ireland. I suppose it is a case of keeping the pressure on, but, at the end of the day, we do not have control over the banks. We can only keep that pressure on and try to persuade them to do what is required to keep the economy buoyant and to ensure their own future business.

Mr Hilditch: My question is on the same theme and in the context of looking to the private sector and the need to grow that sector. Does the Minister have any further comment on the Invest NI decision?

Mr Wilson: It is unfortunate that the money that Invest NI had been hoping to spend on job promotion has not been fully spent this year. Of course, that is not a reflection on the work that is done by Invest NI and by the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment; it is because a lot of that funding has to be matched. If firms cannot find resources, get money from banks or, in some cases, do not have the confidence to invest, there is not a great deal that can be done about that. I want to make it clear to the House that we have reallocated the money to projects that will create

jobs. Job opportunities will not be lost as a result of the money not being spent. For example, when we put money into roads maintenance or the thermal insulation of Housing Executive houses, that creates jobs in the construction sector. When we put money into DEL for the Steps to Work programme, that brings people into training and gives them job opportunities and the ability to move into longer-term employment. It is not the case that money suddenly drops into a hole and there is no job creation from it; we are simply moving it from the DETI budget to other budgets, and different kinds of job are being created.

Mr McNarry: Wizard Wilson's zest for conjuring money never ceases to amaze me, and here we have word of his magic wand turning Big Bad John into the Jolly Green Giant. Let us be fair, the education package is good news, and it should be welcomed by all as such. Will the Minister tell the House the nature of the compelling arguments that convinced him to release the money? Were any conditions attached? In his statement, the Minister said that the package:

> *"will be rolled out over the next three years."*

What is the total amount that will be rolled out over the next three years?

Mr Wilson: I am glad that the Member has moved away from me being the creator of black holes. A year and a half ago there were black holes all over the place that I could not fill, yet it now seems that I have the ability to conjure money. Mind you, during the Budget discussions last year, I thought that some Members from the Ulster Unionist Party thought that I had trees at the bottom of my garden that grew money. They seemed to think that I could finance every one of their demands. I am pleased that the Member recognises that the dire predictions made by his party during the Budget discussions last year have not come to fruition. However, that is not due to my conjuring abilities; rather, it is due to the hard work that was done by Ministers across Departments to manage within the existing available resources.

The Member asked what compelling arguments were made in relation to schools. All Members will have received representations from schools. Schools were faced with a 5% reduction next year, a 1% reduction the following year and a 5% reduction the year after that. Those reductions would have had dire consequences for schools. Indeed, many schools felt that they would have been unable to operate because they would not have had the required teaching complement. Therefore, the first thing was the pressure that schools applied through public representatives,and the Assembly was a useful conduit for local schools to get their message across. Secondly, the Minister of Education and I sat down and discussed the extra allocation. I want to make it clear that I would have been reluctant to simply throw a pile of money at education to avoid some of the hard decisions that still have to be taken. I would not have listened to the Minister's argument had he come to me and told me that he needed money because of the number of school closures and everything else and that, if I did not give him the money, that would happen. There is still a need for reform and for structural reform in education, and the Minister has assured me that he will not shy away from that. Indeed, this money will not enable him to shy away from it, and he has said that publicly. Thirdly, given the resources that we had available, if there was a means of allowing schools to make the transition to some of the changes required and to plan in a better and much more even way for those changes, it was my responsibility to find the necessary resources. That is exactly what we did.

The figure of £120 million over three years is in the public domain; the Minister of Education put it there. We have identified how much money he needs for school budgets over the next number of years. It will come from the review and reallocation of budgets, together with the other moneys that will become available over the next three years from Barnett consequentials, in-year monitoring and savings made by the Department of Education. In that way, we will finance the full amount required.

11.15 am

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his statement. The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment expressed great concern about the return of £21 million by Invest Northern Ireland. There is great concern outside the House, particularly among the business community, which sees the return of £21 million by the major instrument of job creation in government. I ask the Minister two things. First, does he not agree that that sends out a very bad message that will adversely affect the Government's commitment to job creation? Secondly, will he consider giving greater additional flexibility to Invest Northern Ireland to retain some of its money and allow it to be redirected towards other methods of job creation? The situation is serious.

Mr Wilson: The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment shares the concern that the Committee has expressed. Let us face the facts: a lot of Invest NI's spend is demand-led spend. Of course, Invest NI will look for opportunities and does so. I talk to companies that benefit from the money that Invest NI spends, and I listen to what they say. DETI and Invest NI have been increasingly encouraging companies to look at markets well beyond Europe to see what expansion opportunities exist. They have made money available for that and have been inventive in going to areas to look for investment coming into Northern Ireland. However, if projects are not coming forward, the money cannot be spent. I have given all the reasons why, sometimes, those projects are not coming forward.

As far as giving Invest NI flexibility to hold on to money is concerned, the Member knows that I cannot tell a Department that, because it has not spent the money, it can carry it forward into the next financial year. The Departments do not have the ability to do that, and we have limited ability to carry money forward. If money cannot be spent this year, we spend it on alternatives or it goes back to the Treasury.

As I said in answer to an earlier question, if DETI cannot spend the money on job creation, we look at other Departments to determine what programmes and projects they could spend the money on that would create jobs. The record amount of money spent on roads maintenance has created jobs, as has that spent on the thermal insulation of houses. The money that has gone to the Department for Employment and Learning has created jobs, along with a range of other programmes. At least we have sought to use that money to promote the kind of economic opportunities for people to get into work that the Executive made a priority. Of course, if the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment presents ideas on how money might be better

used to promote jobs in a different way, she simply has to make the case for that. As I said, we are looking at allocations, and we have an opportunity to review some of those over the next three years. The door will always be open to practical suggestions.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I still have a considerable number of Members on my list. I ask them to keep their questions concise.

Mr Storey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): "Concise" and "Mervyn Storey" do not go in the same sentence, Mr Deputy Speaker. However, I thank the Finance Minister for the immense work that he and the First Minister have done, particularly in relation to the problems and pressures that have faced the education budget. The allocation of the £30 million is welcome, and I appreciate the Minister's comments about the future and the reform that is needed. However, given the issue of PEDU and the savings in transport and school meals and given his comments in the statement today on his concern about improving forecasts, does he think that there is now a place for PEDU to look at the mechanisms that are in place that could help schools and the Department not to get into the same position this time next year by not surrendering the same amount of money?

Mr Wilson: I have said that my officials will speak to Department of Education officials to ensure that there is better forecasting of what drawdown schools need, how quickly they need it and at what stage you cut off that drawdown if it has been overestimated. We will continue to do that work. It is a simple issue to deal with that simply requires some resolve on the part of the Department of Education to make it clear to schools that, if they want to draw down money, they should tell us at a certain stage in the year and we will not let it go to the last moment.

Ms Lo: On two occasions now, Invest NI has surrendered a substantial amount of money. Should it not rethink its approach? A lot of very small entrepreneurs here who are not looking to export outside Northern Ireland do not receive grants. Should that flexibility not be looked at now to help the local economy?

Mr Wilson: Again, the detail of that question is probably for the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. However, the whole idea of using public money is to ensure that you do not simply rescue a business for the short term but look at the potential for growth in the longer term. That is where a lot of the DETI money is going. Let me emphasise that, first, the money has not been lost as far as job creation is concerned; it has gone into immediate job creation in the economy. Secondly, I think that DETI has done a sterling job, even in the midst of the recession, in still attracting jobs into Northern Ireland and sustaining jobs in existing firms. There will be no unwillingness on the part of my Department to make resources available for that.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister for acknowledging the sensitivity of Invest NI's handing back money for the second monitoring round. Given the economic climate and the way that Invest NI profiles its funding offers, will the Minister take this opportunity to prepare people for the fact that the reduced requirements are likely to be a continuing trend and that, rather than just speeding up Invest NI, we need to take a new approach to mitigate the need to surrender money?

Mr Wilson: Had the Member's party had its way during the previous Budget, Invest NI would not be surrendering any money, because that party wanted to slash Invest NI's budget. I am glad to see that there is now some concern and recognition of the importance of Invest NI and the DETI budget to the promotion of economic growth. Since a lot of this is demand-led and firms do not have confidence about investing in the future, it will be difficult to get investment.

I want to make a point about confidence. I listened this morning to the trade unions, who seem to think that, if you get any good news in Northern Ireland, you have to smack it on the head immediately to make sure that it does not gather any momentum. Instead, they introduce more gloom, doom and despair with mad predictions — they are mad predictions — about the loss of jobs in the public sector. The best thing that people who are involved in all areas of the economy and the media in Northern Ireland can do is to try to encourage some confidence in the economy rather than always knocking everything that happens. Indeed, they should stop trying to compete with each other as to who can make the future look blackest. That would help Arlene Foster in creating jobs and encouraging firms to invest.

Mr Spratt: As Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development, I welcome the Minister's announcement of an additional £10 million capital allocation. In the latter part of his statement, the Minister briefly mentioned the A5. When will he update the House on the implications of the Irish Government's decision to withdraw funding for the scheme?

Mr Wilson: I want to bring to the Executive and Assembly as quickly as possible a revised capital spend profile on the money that we have available. We have £130 million available as a result of money coming from Westminster, some of which is to be spent next year. Some of the A5 money also needs to be spent next year, and, to give confidence to the construction industry, we want to look at the changed spend over the next three years. I want to produce the revised profile as soon as possible, but there obviously has to be agreement before it can be brought to the Assembly.

Mr Byrne: I also welcome the Minister's statement, particularly the increased money for the Roads Service budget. Can he explain what the £2 million of capital expenditure on the old Public Record Office of Northern Ireland is for, given that the building is up for sale?

Mr Wilson: As far as I understand, it is money that is coming back to the Department rather than money being spent. It is a reduced requirement. The detail would be better asked of the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure.

Lord Morrow: Mr Spratt got in ahead of me, but I will try my question anyway. I welcome the statement and the fact that the Minister has announced that we will have the highest level of expenditure ever on our roads. My question is on the £400 million that was allocated to the A5. Since Mr Spratt asked part of my question, I will ask the other part: is the Minister prepared to join me to lobby for that money to be spent on the west? Can he tell the House when the £400 million that was allocated will be redistributed, and will it be retained in the roads budget?

Mr Wilson: If money is returned to the centre, it will be for the Executive to decide how exactly it is spent. I have already indicated that Departments have a large number of

capital projects waiting in the wings. I want the decisions to be made as quickly as possible, and, once capital allocations are made to them, it will be up to individual Ministers where they spend the money, what projects they spend it on and what they prioritise when spending it.

We do not want to simply say that, because it was originally allocated to a project in an area, all the money will automatically be put back into that area if the project does not go ahead. What if there are no good projects there that have a value-for-money basis and a good business case? Do you simply spend the money on lower-priority projects in the area rather than on high-priority projects that benefit the entire Northern Ireland economy? That is how decisions will be made. They will not be made on a geographical or political basis but on the basis of what we need to build the infrastructure of Northern Ireland and where the best projects are to be found.

Mr Lunn: I am sure that the Minister is fed up answering questions about Invest NI, but does he agree that part of the problem with Invest NI might be that, as a result of various reports on it, including one by the Public Accounts Committee a couple of years ago, it is a bit too risk-averse? It is not so much a lack of demand that is the problem; rather, Invest NI is being a bit too cautious in backing projects.

11.30 am

Mr Wilson: I agree with the Member. In fact, I have said time and again in the House that public servants have become very risk-averse, but the House is one reason for that. Members like nothing better than a nice juicy story about money that, with five years' hindsight, they can say might have been better spent. We just love that. We will tear people to shreds and get headlines. If we want people to be less risk-averse, maybe we, as a House, must look at how we address some of those issues, because the culture starts here and percolates right through the public sector.

Mr Allister: In a climate of austerity, it must be surprising that the Minister had twice as much returned to him in resource money as he had in bids. That may suggest that some Ministers, in their original demands, were crying wolf. The Minister commended Departments for the manner in which they reduced and controlled their administration, but the glaring exception to that in table F is the lead Department, OFMDFM. As most other Departments substantially reduced their administration, we find a massive 18% increase in spend in OFMDFM. Why is that? Why is that Department not leading by example? What action will DFP take to reduce what OFMDFM obviously cannot itself reduce — its administration? Will he send PEDU in to take control of that situation and bring it into kilter with the rest of the Departments?

Mr Wilson: I am glad that the Member, as usual, forensically looks at these tables and identifies the one "glaring" figure in them. Sometimes, in such tables, you have to dig into what lies behind a particular figure. As far as I know, and I may be wrong so I am reluctant to be definitive, OFMDFM now has the Attorney General's office in its remit. There has been —

Mr Bell: You would have thought that a lawyer would know that.

Mr Wilson: He will also know that lawyers do not come cheap.

Mr Bell: And they double-job.

Mr Wilson: However, as far as I understand, a large part of that increase in administrative spend was the cost of setting up of the Attorney General's office and its attached expenditure.

Mr B McCrea: As Chair of the Committee for Employment and Learning, I welcome the allocation of £7·7 million to Steps to Work. The Minister spent time defending DETI on job creation. He said that his door was always open, so I draw his attention to his statement that:

> *"That additional allocation will ensure that our employment service is fully funded to assist unemployed people back into work."*

and his conclusion that:

> *"some early decisions that will allow for better planning and delivery".*

Will the Minister address the fact that, already this year, we have had to seek an additional £15·8 million for unemployment services through in-year monitoring and that the unemployment services believe that, from April next year, there will be a structural deficit of around £15 million out of a budget of £90 million? Given his commitment to finding alternative ways to help people back to work —

Mr Deputy Speaker: May we have a question, please?

Mr B McCrea: — and the disappointment of the DETI position, will the Minister indicate how he intends to help the employment services meet the needs of our people?

Mr Wilson: First, we have a recession going on, so unemployment is going up. This year, two bids have been made by the Department for Employment and Learning. Those bids have been fully met because we recognise that a recession and increased unemployment will lead to greater demands on the service available to help unemployed people to get back to work. The Member asked what steps we intend to take. We have shown that, when bids come in from DEL and where we have resources available, we have given priority to helping the unemployed and will continue to do that.

British-Irish Council: 13 January 2012

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister): In accordance with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following report on the seventeenth summit meeting of the British-Irish Council (BIC), which was held in Dublin Castle on 13 January this year. All Executive Ministers who attended the summit have agreed that I should make this statement to the Assembly on their behalf.

The Irish Government hosted the summit, and the heads of delegations were welcomed by the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny TD. The United Kingdom Government delegation was led by the Deputy Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Nick Clegg MP. The Scottish Government were led by the First Minister, the Rt Hon Alex Salmond MSP. The Welsh Government were led by the First Minister, the Rt Hon Carwyn Jones AM. The Government of Jersey were represented by the Chief Minister, Senator Ian Gorst. The Government of Guernsey were represented by the Minister of the Home Department, Deputy Geoff Mahy, and the Isle of Man Government delegation was led by the Chief Minister, the honourable Allan Bell MHK.

In addition to the deputy First Minister and me, the Northern Ireland delegation consisted of Alex Attwood MLA, Minister of the Environment, and Edwin Poots MLA, Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. A full list of participants is attached to the statement that has been provided to Members.

The summit again underlined the British-Irish Council's unique and important role in furthering, promoting and developing links between its member Administrations and in providing a forum for consultation and co-operation on east-west issues. Member Administrations continue to discuss and exchange information with each other on a wide range of matters of mutual interest. All parties at the summit welcomed the opportunity it provided to engage directly with their counterparts on issues of significant concern to all.

The summit discussed the economic situation across each jurisdiction and, in particular, the problem of youth unemployment. The delegations respectively outlined the related challenges that each is facing. Noting the common challenges and the factors that influence the rise of youth unemployment, the heads of Administrations shared details of the initiatives that they had introduced to address youth unemployment within each of their respective Administrations. The Council agreed that it should continue to focus attention on youth unemployment, to explore how best that work might be advanced through the BIC and to commission a more detailed analysis of the impact of specific initiatives on youth unemployment in different Administrations. That will be reported on at the next meeting of the Council in Scotland later this year.

The Council considered and welcomed a discussion paper on recovery from problem drug use. Ministers discussed in particular drug treatment measures and strategies that have been put in place in each Administration to facilitate the path of recovery from drug addiction. The Council noted that a more ambitious approach was needed, involving individual care plans and better interagency working to address the holistic needs of clients. The Council also noted the misuse of drugs work stream's commitment to include a renewed focus on recovery from drug dependence in any future drugs strategies, with a view to maximising the potential for individuals to access the social, economic and cultural benefits of life. The Council agreed that member Administrations would actively encourage the renewed focus on recovery and work together to evaluate and share successful approaches.

The summit meeting received an update on progress in establishing the BIC standing secretariat in Edinburgh and welcomed the confirmation that the standing secretariat became operational on 4 January. The Council noted the forward work plan of the standing secretariat, including the actions that are needed to ensure that the secretariat reaches full capability and the intention to review existing work stream activities with a view to producing a draft BIC strategic business plan for consideration and approval by the Council at the Scotland summit in June this year. In addition to contributing its share of the running costs, this Administration will meet its commitment to provide a seconded staff member to the secretariat. It is expected that they will take up post in the near future.

The Council also noted the progress described in the update reports provided to it on each of the 11 work sectors of the BIC. The issue of formal links with the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA) was raised under any other business. It was agreed that the standing secretariat would liaise with the BIPA secretariat to discuss how linkages might be developed within the parameters agreed by the Council at previous summits.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Council agreed that the next BIC summit would be hosted by Scotland in June 2012.

Mr Elliott (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I thank the First Minister for the statement. I note the intention to produce a draft strategic business plan for consideration. Is no strategic business plan in place for the BIC already? If there is, is this merely a review, or is it a totally new project?

Mr P Robinson: The BIC has agreed a series of work streams. The various groups meet regularly and produce reports under the 11 work streams already in existence. That is the framework that has operated to date. I very much welcome the fact that we now have an east-west secretariat that balances the North/South secretariat. It will be able to give some direction, drive and energy to the work of the BIC. I expect that the business plan will look at the value of the work that has been undertaken, try to assess whether there are further areas that should be considered by the Council, and start the process of building up the necessary research so that that work can be undertaken.

Mr Wells: Members will welcome the creation of the secretariat in Edinburgh. Will the First Minister outline what difference he thinks that that new body will make to the forward work programme of the BIC?

Mr P Robinson: The BIC has discussed having a standing secretariat for a very long time. It was part of the St Andrews Agreement. All parties in the House were in support of having that mechanism put in place. I am delighted that we have done it, with Scotland providing the location and carrying the initial set-up costs. Obviously, there will be costs to us, but they are reasonably minor in government terms; our contribution will be roughly £16,000. We have to provide a secondee on top of that, so our overall

cost will probably be around £75,000, which seems to me to be very good value for money. It will provide a focus on east-west issues. As I indicated, it will provide direction, drive and energy to the process of east-west relationships, and it balances the North/South institutions. All of us in the House should welcome it.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimhe go raibh sibh ag plé dífhostaíochta i measc na n-óg. Ceapaim go bhfuil sé an-tábhachtach go mbeidh deis ag an aos óg. I welcome the fact that the British-Irish Council discussed youth unemployment. We all know the difficulties that our young people face. Without pre-empting the analysis, I note the timescale. Will you give us more details on exactly what areas will be looked at and how the Assembly, or your Department, is co-operating with Scotland, Wales and England?

Mr P Robinson: The discussions did, indeed, include a very detailed discussion on youth unemployment, although it was in the context of the economy more generally.

It struck me as rather frustrating that, on that same day that we had news of the job losses at Ulster Bank, which have consequences both for GB and Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, there was a good-news announcement that the Chicago Mercantile Exchange would bring jobs to Northern Ireland, which is a major boost for the economy. The two major exchanges in the world, the New York Stock Exchange and the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, both now recognise the value of placing themselves in Northern Ireland. No matter how fast you pedal, there will always be difficulties with job losses during a recession.

11.45 am

In relation to unemployment more generally, the statistics show that, at 6·9%, Northern Ireland has a lower level of unemployment than Scotland, Wales, or the UK average. It has an unemployment rate that is less than half that of the Irish Republic. We have the lowest level of youth unemployment in the UK. However, all those figures are masked by the fact that there is a very high level of economically inactive people, particularly young people, in Northern Ireland, which is a very real problem. We outlined the various measures that are being taken, particularly by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL). I should point out that the Minister for Employment and Learning has indicated that, at our next Executive meeting, he will bring forward a strategy for dealing with youth unemployment. That will be of interest to the Member and the rest of the House.

A project was led by Enda Kenny. As we went around the room, we heard about the wide range of measures being taken by the various member Administrations to deal with youth unemployment. It was felt that it would be of value to task officials to look at those measures to see whether they are working, and if so, which works best, and to report to the summit in Scotland in June. That will be of value because it allows us to use some comparators in relation to the work that we are doing. That will be made available to Members as soon as we have it.

Mr Eastwood: Given the recent and very public debate on Scottish independence and "devolution max", what discussions, if any, have there been on further devolution of powers to this Assembly, outside of the discussions on corporation tax?

Mr P Robinson: There have been discussions, obviously, with the Government on corporation tax and air passenger duty. Those discussions have not taken place in the context of the BIC and, indeed, the issue of Scottish independence did not come up during the meeting of the BIC, but it certainly was the main issue during the press conference afterwards.

My view is that it is obviously a matter entirely for the people of Scotland as to how they determine their future. However, I very much hope that it will be as an integral part of the United Kingdom. I cannot help but think that there is an irony that, at a moment when there seems to be a real possibility of some form of break-up of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland is not the cause of it.

Mr Deputy Speaker: It might be helpful if I remind Members to focus their questions on the statement.

Mr Lunn: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. You have completely snookered my question. I will chance my arm anyway. *[Laughter.]* Mr Eastwood mentioned corporation tax. In the general discussions among the very high level delegations at the conference, was there any discussion of corporation tax, and, in particular, was there any indication of the attitude of the Scottish people to our attempts to obtain a reduction?

Mr P Robinson: The only reference to corporation tax was made by our delegation when dealing with the economy and our priority to rebuild and rebalance our economy. That, I think, allows the Member's question to be relevant. We know that the Scottish Government want to have power over the setting of corporation tax levels and has used Northern Ireland's discussions with the Government in order to stake their claim. So I do not think that there is any doubt about the intention of the Scottish Government, but I am not sure what the view of the Scottish people might be on the issue.

As far as our case is concerned, we are continuing to work with the Government. There is a ministerial working group, and officials are working at the same time. On the present timetable, I suspect that we are more likely to see a response from the Government in the summer than at any time before that.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the First Minister for the statement. I welcome the establishment of an east-west secretariat and strengthened links between the constituent parts of the United Kingdom and, indeed, the Republic of Ireland. The First Minister will be aware that I have the privilege to represent North Belfast in the House. In my constituency, many young people, particularly from the Protestant community and those in the hard-to-reach communities, have been in unemployment for some time. Will the First Minister work closely with Ministers from across the United Kingdom and the Republic to find best practice solutions to addressing the scourge of youth unemployment in our society?

Mr P Robinson: Yes, indeed. The youth unemployment rate in the United Kingdom as a whole is about 22%. It is 29·8% in the Republic of Ireland, 23·5% in Scotland, 22·9% in Wales, and 18·2%, which is the lowest, in Northern Ireland. However, as I said, although our overall unemployment rates and our rates of youth unemployment are the lowest, the statistics do not take into account our level of economic

inactivity, which is much higher than it is elsewhere in the UK. I fully understand the problems that are faced in north Belfast; they are shared across the city. It is a lost resource to our economy. There is, therefore, a real value for the Government to ensure that they have in place measures that can bring people out of unemployment and into full-time employment.

Having spoken to DEL officials, I know that it is clear that the document, which will be produced and provided to the Executive during the course of their next meeting, will deal with a wide range of interventions that can take place. They will range from the preventative, which will try to identify areas and so forth where there is likely to be a high incidence of youth unemployment, to interventions that can be put in at a very early stage. The document will be of value, and I think Members will want to have a very full discussion about it when Stephen Farry produces it in a fortnight's time.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. In the "aon ghnó eile" — any other business — section of the meeting formal links between BIPA, the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, and BIC, the British-Irish Council, were discussed. The First Minister said that:

> *"linkages might be developed within the parameters agreed by the Council at previous summits."*

What are those parameters?

Is there any likelihood of a take-up on the part of Nick Clegg or Alex Salmond about the offer that Stormont Castle might become available for constitutional and peace talks?

Mr P Robinson: We are happy to rent it out, I think; it might help our economy. With regard to the issue that came up under any other business, it is worth pointing out that there is a general view in the BIC that BIPA should not become the parliament to a BIC executive, but that there will be a wide range of areas where BIPA will want to report and allow us to have the value of its views. The work streams in which BIPA and the BIC will be operating will probably be better co-ordinated in that area. That is how I see it going, and that certainly has been the view expressed at previous meetings.

Mr Spratt: I thank the First Minister for his statement. What processes are now in place to ensure that the size of the Northern Ireland delegation is proportionate and appropriate to the size of the other delegations?

Mr P Robinson: That is a difficult one, because some statutory requirements apply to Northern Ireland but not to other jurisdictions. There is an entitlement on the part of any Minister who wants to attend North/South Ministerial Council or BIC meetings if a matter relating to their Department is on the agenda. However, that led to a farcical situation at a previous meeting, where we ended up with the embarrassing spectacle of having 10 Ministers from Northern Ireland to two Ministers from each of the other delegations. Therefore, the deputy First Minister and I wrote to all Ministers — last November, I think — indicating that, unless they were responsible for the substantial business element of a meeting, we would, as a matter of guidance, encourage them not to attend. On this occasion, we managed to get attendance down to me, the deputy First Minister and two other Ministers.

Given the financial restraints that we operate under — it is not just a matter of each Minister going along, you also get the ministerial entourage, and that can be quite costly — I think that we have it about right at this stage. The other delegations increased to three, and we sent four on this occasion. It certainly is much better. Ministers have a statutory right to be there, and they are exercising some restraint by not being there.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the First Minister. The Council apparently "noted the progress" in the 11 work sectors of the BIC. If there was nothing worth reporting, will the First Minister address what benefit we might anticipate to the people of Northern Ireland from this ongoing work?

Mr P Robinson: It is not that there was nothing worth reporting, it is just that the 11 work streams periodically report to the BIC, and, on this occasion, we were dealing with issues relating to youth unemployment and drug abuse. At a future meeting, there will be reports from the other work streams, and, of course, we participate in all those work streams and lead, I think, three or four of them. At each BIC meeting, we will bring forward aspects of the reports from various work streams.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I also welcome the Minister's statement, particularly the fact that recovery from drug use was discussed. The Minister, like most Members, will be aware of the growing problem of people under the age of 18 becoming addicted to drugs. They need help, and so do their parents and families because the children affected are so young. Was there any discussion about family support or a dedicated residential facility to treat under-18s with that type of problem? I know that other jurisdictions have that in place.

Mr P Robinson: Drug abuse is an important issue for us to deal with. The Health Minister, who was present and spoke on that issue on behalf of the Northern Ireland delegation, pointed out that, although it is a significant issue for us, the big issue in Northern Ireland has been alcohol abuse. Alcohol abuse causes about three and a half to four times the number of deaths that occur from drug abuse. That is not to reduce the importance of the problem of drug abuse. I think that the last statistics were from 2009, and about 84 people died from it in that year, so it is a significant factor.

The Health Minister also pointed out that a large part of the problem, and one that is probably more significant here than in any other part of the whole British Isles, is the abuse of prescription drugs. His Department is looking closely at monitoring the prescriptions that are issued and how prescription drugs get into the hands of those who abuse them. That is a big issue for us. Cocaine is probably the drug most used in Northern Ireland.

Obviously, we are doing this in the context of the overall issue of drug abuse. Nevertheless, it was focused on recovery, which brings me to the issue raised by the Member. I am told by officials that we do not have a major problem in this element of drug abuse. We have a person-centred approach to dealing with recovery, whereas there are much higher levels elsewhere in the UK and, indeed, the South. Northern Ireland is in a much more manageable position to do it on a single person-centred approach.

12.00 noon

Mr G Robinson: What is the Northern Ireland contribution to the new secretariat as regards finances and personnel?

Mr P Robinson: The Member will forgive me if I have not got it right to the last penny, but our contribution is about £16,000, which is 9% of the overall cost. On top of that, we have made a commitment to second an employee, and an official will come from the Department for Regional Development. Therefore, there will be some reference to the Committee on that matter before we publicise who our representative will be. When you add all the costs together, our contribution will be around £75,000 overall.

Mr B McCrea: I note the First Minister's welcome of an east-west forum to discuss these matters, with the focus on youth employment. Notwithstanding the point about economically inactive people, youth unemployment in Northern Ireland has risen faster than in any other region of the United Kingdom. The Department for Work and Pensions has already announced a £940 million package called Youth Contract to address the issue, and Scotland and Wales have their initiatives in place. Will the First Minister explain what information he gained about those initiatives in the exchange of information and why we do not yet have a similar package in place to challenge what, he agrees, is a very serious problem?

Mr P Robinson: Youth unemployment has risen so fast because it came from a low base. As I have already indicated, our levels of youth unemployment — leaving aside the issue of the economically inactive — are lower than anywhere else in the British Isles, with the exception of one or two of the dependencies, which have virtually no unemployment at all.

I do not want to steal the fire, having been given a briefing by Stephen Farry's departmental official. Stephen Farry is bringing out his report on youth unemployment in the next couple of weeks. When it is published, the Member will see that a number of interventions are recommended. However, it needs to be said that a series of interventions and funding arrangements is already in place. Whether we are talking about Pathways to Work or Steps to Work or about some of the youth funding that is available, a plethora of funds, programmes and interventions is already there. The strategy coming out in a few weeks' time will look at the value of each of those and whether there will be a recommendation for some other or others to be put in place.

Mr I McCrea: I thank the First Minister for his statement. As an Ulster Scot, I was disappointed to see the work of the British-Irish Council — certainly the press element of it — overtaken by the potential Scottish referendum. Has the First Minister made an analysis of the impact of a potential Scottish referendum on the work of the British-Irish Council?

Mr P Robinson: The referendum will have zero impact on the BIC; however, the outcome of the referendum might have an impact on the work of the BIC. Nevertheless, we need to point out — the people opposite will probably not like the language — that, if we are dealing with a body that covers the British Isles as a whole, we have to recognise that not all of them are in the United Kingdom. The Republic of Ireland is not a member of the United Kingdom, yet it is part of the BIC. I think that, even if Scotland were to make the decision that all of us in the House would, I am sure, unanimously agree we do not want it to make, that would not stop it being a member of the BIC. I have to say that I do not see BIC membership being the main issue during the debate on the Scottish referendum.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Perhaps it is appropriate that that is the end of questions to the First Minister.

Preschool Admissions

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Education wishes to make a statement.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Thank you, a LeasCheann Comhairle. You are quicker off your mark than I am.

I would like to make a statement to the Assembly on the outcome of the review of preschool admissions arrangements. Members will recall the private Members' debate on 7 June 2011, during which nursery and preschool education were discussed. At that time, I indicated my intention to review the procedures associated with the preschool programme, including the benefits of bringing in statutory preschool education. My priority as Minister is to create an education service that ensures that all our young people receive a high-quality education. I made a statement to the House in September entitled 'Putting Pupils First: Shaping Our Future'. I emphasised that my focus would be on the needs of children over institutions. I made clear the importance of ensuring that quality and the needs of all our children, including those with special educational needs, are to the fore. That applies to preschool education in the same way as to any other sector.

There have been developments since I announced the review in June 2011. I am particularly encouraged by the commitment in the draft Programme for Government to ensure that at least one year of preschool education is available to every family who wants it. That aligns with DE's existing policy objectives and signals the wider Executive commitment to preschool education.

The outcome of the review, which I am announcing today, will be an important factor in considering what changes are needed. The establishment of the Education and Skills Authority will also offer a changed context in which to take forward some of the actions identified in the report.

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the good preschool education that is available across the region. In the current year, over 23,000 children are in funded preschool education, with a budget of approximately £50 million. That is a significant investment. Sometimes, we hear about the difficulties in the system, the children who have not secured a place, for whatever reason, or the parents who have concerns. However, the vast majority of pupils are allocated a place in which they receive a good preschool education that prepares them for the next important phase of primary school and, indeed, for later life.

My first priority is to ensure that, no matter where preschool education is provided, it is of a high quality. That is achieved through the skills and expertise of staff and is governed by the Education and Training Inspectorate, through whose inspections we are raising standards across providers. Although there are still areas for improvement, we should be rightly proud of the general standard of preschool education provided. Across every area of the North, children have access to good education across all sectors. I commend excellence wherever it is found. Equally, I expect improvement in the less successful preschool settings, in whatever sector, and will take steps to ensure that that is the case.

The review contains 17 actions in total. I will draw Members' attention to those that might be of most interest. At the outset, I want to make it clear that, although some of the actions identified are straightforward, others are more complex and would have significant implications for the way in which the preschool programme is run and managed. In the case of some of the more far-reaching actions, further investigation, detailed costings and possible additional consultation or legislation will be required. I will also wish to consider implications for the Irish-medium sector in particular. The report should, therefore, be regarded as a framework for action rather than a list of agreed actions to be implemented immediately.

I turn to the key actions. In June, there was some debate in the House on whether there should be a statutory right to preschool education. That can mean different things to different people. To some, it means a right to a statutory place. For others, the interpretation of a statutory right to preschool education might be for the Department's existing policy to be enshrined in legislation. However, it would not make economic sense at this time to ignore or displace the quality provision that has benefited from previous public investment and has many strengths to commend it. No particular advantage to enshrining the existing policy in statute has been identified, as it would not increase the likelihood of parents gaining a place for their child in their preferred setting. I have therefore decided that the Department will not seek to place the existing preschool policy on a statutory basis at this time.

Other strategic actions have been identified to address specific pressures on the preschool programme. They need to be examined in more detail and include amending legislation to address the issue of underage children in statutory settings. Although good administrative progress has been made to ensure that priority is given to children in their immediate preschool year, there are still underage children securing places. Also, a number of schools are continuing to offer reception provision, which has been shown to be educationally undesirable and can cause operational problems on the ground. Legislative amendments will also be needed to address that matter.

The strategic planning of places is particularly challenging for preschool as there can be significant variations in numbers and locations that apply only for one year. I know that that issue is of particular concern to Members. In the first instance, the Department will look to the education and library boards and the preschool education advisory groups (PEAGs) and, subsequently, the Education and Skills Authority to improve the statistical data used to inform local area planning and to develop plans to address shortfall. We also expect a protocol to be developed to encourage and support the creation of additional voluntary private sector provision where it is required. In the statutory sector, the Department will review its policy on enrolment numbers to see whether greater flexibility can be introduced; for example, time-limited temporary extensions.

In progressing area-based planning, the Department and ESA will also undertake a strategic review of the number and location of preschool places to inform future planning. Some actions seek to improve the admissions application experience for parents and carers, including a more centralised administration, greater use of technology, revised information about the programme, as necessary, and a new communications strategy.

The review has also identified significant policy issues that will require detailed further consideration and investigation before a decision is made on how they should be handled.

In relation to the duration of preschool provision, both part-time and full-time provision are funded in the preschool programme. We need to look at that in some detail, and I intend to examine it further as part of the early years strategy.

The review also highlights the fact that some primary schools use attendance at a specified nursery or other preschool setting as part of their admissions criteria. That is an admissions issue beyond the preschool sector, and I want to look at it in more detail before reaching a final decision on how it can best be addressed. I have also identified some actions that I intend to progress immediately.

The report confirms previous findings that the July/August birthdays admissions criterion can potentially disadvantage younger children in their preschool year. I intend to revoke that criterion in the 1999 regulations and remove it as a priority criterion for non-statutory providers. I will also move to review and broaden the definition of the phrase "children from socially disadvantaged circumstances" and amend the regulations as appropriate. Amendment of those key criteria will have a major impact on the preschool admissions process. To ensure that the process operates on a fair, consistent and equitable basis across all sectors and areas, the Department will work with key stakeholders to develop a preschool admissions code. I fully recognise the role of boards of governors and management committees in setting individual admissions criteria. However, the Department will provide specific guidance about its expectations in relation to particular groups of children.

The review offers a sound framework for further work by identifying potential actions. As I have already explained, further work will be needed to decide how best to progress some of those. The complex nature of the preschool programme means that some actions can have further and more far-reaching consequences than might first appear to be the case, and we need to ensure that we fully understand all of them. Today, I have also identified some actions that the Department will begin to implement immediately. However, the current process for admissions has already commenced, and it will not be possible to introduce changes for September 2012.

Other aspects of the review will be considered as part of the early years strategy and will inform the work that is to be carried out under the Programme for Government. The introduction of the Education and Skills Authority will offer an opportunity to develop a more streamlined and co-ordinated programme, and I will look to it to take forward the relevant actions.

12.15 pm

I also take this opportunity to announce my intention to allocate a further one-off payment of £1·25 million to the private and community sectors. That will equate to an additional £150 per place for this year only. Members will be aware of the not insignificant funding differential between the voluntary and private sectors and the statutory sector. That is documented in a number of reports and is a matter that the Department needs to address. The current cost of a place in a non-statutory setting is £1,565 compared with £1,827 for a part-time nursery unit or £1,949 for a nursery school. Full-time places are, of course, more costly.

I deliberated carefully before deciding to make this payment this year. My preference would be to consolidate it for future years. However, I do not want to pre-empt the early years strategy, and I am also very mindful of the difficult budgetary position that I face. Many of the actions that I outlined have cost implications. I concluded, therefore, that it would not be prudent to announce a consolidated uplift at this time. I will, however, revisit the issue later this year.

The review provides a useful framework to improve the operation of the preschool programme and will support the Department in its aim of making a place available to every child whose family desires it. It will inform the early years strategy and the Programme for Government work that has been identified. The preschool programme is a genuine partnership, and I value that. It is delivered through the statutory and voluntary sectors, both of which are highly valued. I want to harness the strengths of the different sectors and encourage them to work together in a productive partnership so that the distinctive offerings of each sector can be recognised and contribute to this important programme. Parents and carers are also an important part of that partnership. Parents have a fundamental role to play in contributing to a child's early education, and I look to them to play their part in supporting and encouraging their child in the preschool setting.

As I said at the outset, we have much to be proud of in our preschool programme. There is a good foundation, but we need to develop it so that it is better able to respond positively and flexibly to the needs of parents and children, so that each child gets the best possible start in formal education. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I very much welcome the Minister's statement, in particular the extra funding for preschool places and the fact that the Department will address the July/August birthday criterion issue.

Why is there a mixture of statutory nursery places and funded places within the voluntary and private sectors? Does the Minister also believe that changes to the funding differential that he outlined could reduce the level of displacement?

Mr O'Dowd: We have a mixture of statutory, community and voluntary and private sector because of the expansion of this programme. Since 1997, we have been putting in place a new tier of education. We have our primary, post-primary and further and higher education. Since 1997, however, a new tier has been put in place. Historically, there has been nursery provision in statutory settings. To expand this programme, however, it was felt at the time that we needed a partnership between the statutory sector and the community and voluntary and private sectors. That has been working quite successfully over the past number of years and has been able to deliver services right across the North where once they were unavailable. It is certainly something I wish to expand on. I wish to see the statutory and community and voluntary sectors expand. I also want to see them being equally valued, hence my announcement about further funds. It is a matter that has to be consolidated. It is not the best way to announce funding for any programme this late on in the year. I have no doubt that the moneys will

be spent and spent wisely, but I want to be in a position to inform the community and voluntary sector and, indeed, the statutory sector of their funding arrangements as early in the financial year as possible.

Mrs Dobson: I welcome the Minister's announcement about temporary variations to preschool enrolments under a flexible entry scheme. Will the Minister consider extending that flexible entry to future years and expanding the definition of disadvantage in relation to preschool places?

Mr O'Dowd: It is certainly an answer over the next number of years. I would much prefer to see an area-based planning programme, where we have accurately identified the needs of the community so that we can put our longer-term planning in place. Certainly, over the next number of years, I want to be in a position to give temporary variations to statutory settings. It is unfortunate that the current practice is that we have a 26-place nursery provision that cannot be expanded outside a development proposal. I believe that, under current legislation and provisions, we can allow a temporary variation to such settings to bring in a small number of children. That will not affect the educational outcomes of the rest of the cohort; it certainly will not affect the safety and other standards expected of nursery provision. It is a welcome temporary step, but I want area planning in place that allows for long-term provision and planning in areas without constantly having to resort to temporary variations.

Mr McDevitt: I welcome the aspects of the statement that definitely move the issue on somewhat. Will the Minister clarify what appears to be a rather confused part of his statement? If every child aged three should have access to a preschool or nursery place, to which the draft Programme for Government commits the Executive, what is the barrier to providing that guarantee of access in statute? In other words, what, in the Minister's mind, is the barrier to creating a statutory right for every child aged three to access to a preschool or nursery place in the North of Ireland?

Mr O'Dowd: We could take up a considerable amount of the time of the Committee and the House in legislating to guarantee a statutory place. Legislation is not always required to fulfil a government pledge or policy or to fulfil elements of the Programme for Government. The draft Programme for Government clearly states that the objective of the Executive is to put in place preschool education for every young person whose family requires it. That will be fulfilled; I have no doubt about that. That does not require the distraction of legislation or taking up the time of the Education Committee, the Department or the Assembly. The best way forward is to implement the actions of the preschool review, move forward with the early years strategy and put in place all the actions to ensure that all our young people have a quality preschool experience.

Mr Lunn: I welcome the Minister's very positive statement, particularly his reference to the July/August birthday admissions. We are getting some action on that at long last. I want to ask the Minister about reviewing and broadening the definition of children from socially disadvantaged circumstances. If there is to be a place for every child, as there is, effectively, at the moment, will the Minister explain why there is a need to expand and amend the definition of socially disadvantaged circumstances?

Mr O'Dowd: That matter was raised with me during discussions on the review. The social disadvantage provision is in place for very sound educational reasons: we want to encourage children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds into preschool education and educate our way out of poverty. That is a very sound basis for that provision.

There have been changes in the welfare system since the definition of jobseeker's allowance and income support were included that require legislative change to broaden the context. We also have welfare reform and universal credit coming at us, and we will have to look at the implications of those. Certainly, however, if we are to provide a place to every child who requires it, why do we need specific legislation to protect young people from socially deprived areas? I will keep that under review as the programme rolls out and as we fulfil our Programme for Government commitment. I will review the impact of that against the need for the social clause in the legislation and keep an open mind. At this stage, however, I want to keep it in place. I want to ensure that children from socially deprived backgrounds get access to preschool education and that the Executive are educating our young people out of poverty.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his welcome statement. I hope that it will go some way to alleviate some of the problems that exist and the frustration that parents encounter when accessing nursery places.

I ask the Minister to expand on or clarify the following comment:

> *"the Department will provide specific guidance about its expectations in relation to particular groups of children."*

Mr O'Dowd: That largely relates to the previous question from Mr Lunn in respect of children from socially deprived backgrounds, etc. I will also change the legislation in relation to the provision of preschool education. The legislation has always referred to children in the year before they enter formal education. However, that has broad definitions in other circumstances, and we have seen a significant number of children aged two and upwards going into preschool education. So, I want to define that in legislation and give guidance to boards of governors and management committees as to how that will be administered.

Mr B McCrea: The Minister talks about social disadvantage. How does he feel about the fact that hard-working parents who go to work and pay their taxes feel disadvantaged because they cannot get their child into the school that is nearest to them? If we are looking at universal provision, surely we ought to find a better way so that people, particularly those in Lisburn, are not disadvantaged, as they have been in the past number of years.

Mr O'Dowd: Let us be clear about this: there are many hard-working parents who, through no fault of their own, have found themselves unemployed. We have actually seen a rise in the number of applicants to preschool education through the social clause. Being unemployed certainly should not be interpreted as the fault of the person who is unemployed. What we are doing is ensuring that, particularly in communities where there is a history of social disadvantage, we are educating those communities out of social disadvantage. I think that that is a good investment

by the Department and the Executive in the long-term development of society.

In general, the number of children accessing preschool education under the social clause varies across the spectrum from around 15% to 18%. However, it is as high as 40% in some areas. That, in turn, reflects on the unemployment and deprivation figures in those areas. Let us focus on why that policy was brought into place and whether it is a good policy. Will it help with the Executive's overall drive to change society? I think so. Yes, there is a certain frustration among individual parents in certain areas who see the clause as depriving their child of a place at their local school. On the other side, I have also said that I am prepared to look at the enrolment numbers in certain settings and that I want to see better area planning to ensure that nursery provision and preschool provision is provided where needed. I think that by balancing those out, we can move forward to meet the needs of those who, through no fault of their own, find themselves socially disadvantaged at this time and families who are continuing in employment and see themselves as being at a disadvantage. Both of those working in parallel will solve that problem.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas ar an athbhreithniú ar na socruithe iontrála don réamhscolaíocht. I thank the Minister for responding to the debate about the review that the SDLP brought to the Floor on 7 June 2011. Will he indicate what criteria might be used to broaden the category of social disadvantage, as indicated in the statement? What action will he take to create a level playing field for the voluntary and community sector, from the point of view of transforming qualifications, improving accommodation and increasing special needs support?

Mr O'Dowd: I am always keen to respond to the SDLP and to show it how things should be done. The Member raises a very relevant point. I will deal with the community and voluntary sector and put it on a level playing field with the statutory sector largely through funding. I indicated in the announcement that additional funding has been given to the sector. However, I want to await the outcome of the early years review. I will continue to interrogate my budget to see how best to use it. I am conscious that, as part of that process, I will have to look at the community and voluntary sector in respect of early years provision and to invest in that.

12.30 pm

However, it has to be said that standards in the community and voluntary and private sectors are generally very good. They continue to rise all the time, and we can see that through inspection reports. Community and voluntary settings are open to inspection in the same way as statutory settings. So, that standard is rising all the time. The training of staff who work in those centres is improving all the time, and you can see those results throughout the reports of the training inspectorate.

As Members and as an Assembly, we should recognise the commitment and role of the community and voluntary and private sectors in the delivery of preschool education. We should not differentiate between nursery schools and community and voluntary settings. Both types of organisations provide the same curriculum and first-rate — as well as age-appropriate, it has to be said — education to our young people. So, I intend to bring the community and voluntary sector on to a level playing field through all those measures.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle, agus Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an Aire tráthnóna inniu. How will the Minister's Department actually implement the commitment to guarantee a year's preschool education to all children who want it?

Mr O'Dowd: It is a Programme for Government commitment. Therefore, it is my firm view, and, indeed, that of the Executive and OFMDFM, that it has to be delivered. I believe that the internal review that my Department carried out will go a long way in assisting us to ensure that a place is offered to the young people and families who want it. These arrangements will go a long way towards ensuring that that happens, and the early years strategy will also continue to secure that situation. Through work with the education and library boards and preschool groups, as well as the move towards the ESA, I believe firmly that we will be able to deliver on our Programme for Government commitment.

Mrs Overend: The issue of socially disadvantaged circumstances has been raised time and time again. I understand the Minister's reasoning, which he explained to others in the Chamber, for broadening the definition of children from socially disadvantaged circumstances. Will he bring forward proposals for more engagement with parents, given the need to educate families out of poverty? Surely we also need to reach parents. Does he have any proposals with that in mind?

Mr O'Dowd: One action point in the document deals with greater information for parents. In my view, part of that has to be about why preschool education is required and why we want to encourage parents and guardians to bring children into preschool education. Regardless of our investment in broader education or the commitment and dedication of staff in education, a number of reports point to the fact that around 20% of any person's educational attainment is obtained in the classroom and 80% in the home environment, community and broader settings.

Therefore, in the months ahead, I will put in place a public information programme that will appeal to parents and guardians in the broader community and inform them of their role in education. Education is not simply about bringing their children to school and leaving them at the school gates; it has to break out of the school gates and get back into the family home, the community, sporting organisations and all the organisations out there that will play a part in recapturing the gift of education. Those organisations will also play a part in encouraging young people, especially those in hard-to-reach communities, to learn about the need for education and the self-improvement and enjoyment that can be achieved through it. That programme of work will be rolled out over the next number of months. I think that, as mentioned in one of the report's action points, we can also send information on the need for preschool education to communities and parents.

Mrs Cochrane: I, too, thank the Minister for his statement. Indeed, I could almost come down there and kiss him for the July/August suggestion. *[Laughter.]* However, that is probably not appropriate.

Unfortunately, the anomaly this year will affect children in east Belfast, and children from areas such as Conlig and

Dunmurry will get places. I trust that we will be able to work together to ensure that places are made available immediately for those who are affected.

The Minister referred to the improved application process. How will he deal with the fact that letters of offer will be sent out on 30 March 2012, which is the day on which schools break for Easter? How will he deal with parents whose children have not got places and make information available to them over the couple of weeks that the schools are still off?

Mr O'Dowd: Through my statement, and, indeed, the report, I acknowledged that a lot of the report's actions will not come into effect this year. They will affect the programme of work for 2013-14. That is important to point out. However, on the action points about better information going out to parents, we should be using more technology more effectively and using a centralised system. ESA will put that in place, but I will ask my officials to discuss with the boards how we can centralise the administration of the process more effectively, even in the run-up to the establishment of ESA.

I am keen to learn from past practices. If, as the Member said, letters of information are going out when schools are on their mid-term or Easter break, there has to be a better way of doing it. Simple processes and planning should eradicate that. In fairness, it should not require a report by a Minister or anyone else to rectify the situation.

The Member referred to the July/August birthday issue. I hope to deal with that in legislation connected to ESA. I will have to have discussions and reach agreement with the Committee for Education to do that, and, ultimately, I will require the Assembly's agreement to pass the legislation, but I hope that we can progress it. If that is not felt to be the appropriate manner in which to address the issue, I will introduce separate legislation, but I am keen to remove that provision from the statute book.

Mr Storey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): I apologise to the Minister and the House for not being present for all of the statement, but I had to meet representatives of schools that are still concerned about the Minister's budget. Although the announcement of additional money is welcome, there is detail that has still to be worked out. I also thank the Minister for giving me and the Deputy Chairperson a briefing earlier this morning on the statement that he made to the House.

Although I welcome the fact that the Minister is proposing to move on the July/August birthday issue — I assure him that I have no intention of following the desire of the Member for East Belfast — I am concerned that, in the Minister's mind and in the Department's mind, it seems that better outcomes can somehow be achieved by injecting money into the system. What I mean by that is that surely the inspector's report has to be taken into consideration when looking at outcomes, and there is still a considerable way to go for the community and voluntary sector. His report is very clear that the outcomes from the statutory sector are outstanding. What assurances will the Minister give and what mechanisms will he put in place to ensure that the community and voluntary sector gives us better outcomes as a result of having additional money? Will he assure the House that it will not just be a case of throwing money at some organisations that have very lucrative private businesses as a result of providing education for our children?

Mr O'Dowd: The Chairperson raises a pertinent point in very difficult budgetary times. He mentioned the recent announcement on the very welcome investment in education, but we are certainly not out of the woods yet. We have a lot of hard work to do in education. There are a lot of difficult decisions to be made on how we administer, manage and run our schools estate and on what our schools estate will look like. I am certainly not of the mindset or in the mood to be throwing money away. I want to ensure that any money that I invest produces good educational outcomes for the people whom we are here to serve.

The Chairperson rightly refers to the inspectorate's report. It has identified improvements in the community and voluntary sector. Individual inspection reports on the sector also provide welcome news that individual units are improving all the time. The Chairperson is correct that the outcomes in the statutory sector are outstanding, but there are individual reports in the statutory sector that cause concern. Therefore, it is like the rest of our education system: there are good areas and there are areas for improvement.

How will we ensure that the money is being spent wisely and is a good investment? The Education and Training Inspectorate is in there inspecting all the premises that the Chairperson mentioned. It reports back to me as Minister and to my Department on the progress being made, and, where I find individual failings, interventions will be made. If I find failings across the sector, I will have to examine my own policies and examine what support mechanisms are in place for the community and voluntary sector and for all other sectors. I will have to ensure that the policy framework allows the development of the sectors and ensure that we are providing them with proper resources and training. However, I will not be throwing money anywhere, because I have no money to throw about.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes questions to the Minister of Education. The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately on the lunchtime suspension. I propose, therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time.

The sitting was suspended at 12.40 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Finance and Personnel

Mr Speaker: As we move into Question Time, I am told that the Building's alarm bell, which alerts Members to the beginning of Question Time, is not working. At one stage, I wondered whether even the Minister would arrive. We are trying to fix the alarm system.

Question 7 has been withdrawn and requires a written response.

Government Contracts: Social Clauses

1. **Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what percentage of active procurement contracts include social clauses. *(AQO 1063/11-15)*

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Thank you, Mr Speaker. You are quite right. I was at the meeting of the all-party construction group. I am glad that I have a very efficient private secretary, who noticed that the bell had not rung and got me here on time.

Procurement contracts for goods, works and services that are awarded by the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) include standard social clauses that require compliance with applicable fair employment, equality of treatment and health and safety legislation, etc. In addition, in higher-value construction-related contracts, we routinely include provisions for work opportunities for the unemployed and apprentices and, more recently, for students on construction-related courses.

Of the 28 active works contracts that were awarded by CPD through the eSourcing portal, some 90% have additional requirements for employment opportunities. Those requirements were revised with effect from September 2011 and now also apply to lower-value contracts. The scope for including employment obligations in supplies and services contracts is more limited. Typically, those contracts have a lower value, but where social clauses can be applied, we have applied them.

Currently, seven higher-value contracts for services and supplies include employment-related clauses. It is not possible to give a percentage for live contracts, as that information is not held by the CPD.

Mr P Maskey: I thank the Minister for his answer. I recognise that the use of social clauses is included in the Programme for Government (PFG), and that is a step in the right direction. Social clauses can make a big difference to communities, particularly those in areas of social need. Will the Minister consider lowering the threshold to encourage the increased use of social clauses in contracts?

Mr Wilson: We have already lowered the limit, and there are difficulties in lowering it too much. For example, including requirements in small-value contracts that so many apprentices or long-term unemployed must be employed would not work, if, because of the value of the contract, only a small number of people are employed. You reach a threshold below which it is impossible to impose such social clauses.

As I said, we lowered the threshold in September 2011. More important, we intend to monitor how contractors comply with social clauses, and we will continue to do that. I am sure that the Member will appreciate that there is probably not enough employment in low-value contracts without imposing requirements that so many apprentices, students or unemployed people should be taken on.

Mr McQuillan: I want to touch on the implementation of social clauses in construction procurement contracts. Minister, how exactly is that monitored?

Mr Wilson: It is monitored in a number of ways. First, it is in the general guidance when a contract is awarded. Secondly, we require contractors to show the number of students, apprentices or the long-term unemployed that they have taken on.

Let me give an example: under the new requirements, 5% of the main contractor's workforce and first-tier subcontractor's workforce, where there are 20 or more employees, must be employed in formally recognised apprenticeships. It is easy to check that out by determining from the contract whether the main and first-tier subcontractors meet that 5% criterion and then looking at the number of apprentices employed on the site.

Mr P Ramsey: I want to follow on from the question asked by the Member for West Belfast. We all know the importance of social contracts. Will the Minister outline models and examples of where best practice is involved in social contracts and how he foresees increasing those benefits in the future?

Mr Wilson: I cannot give an example of a contract. I go out to sites once every week or two to look at where we spend money. Very often, people on those sites point out the apprentices who will be employed and get their experience on the scheme. We laid down the numbers: for example, for every £250,000 of labour in a contract, the main contractor has to provide one person with a 13-week employment opportunity through Steps to Work or an equivalent programme. That is a good example of how we are using public procurement to take people off the unemployment register and give them an opportunity to get into work. Hopefully, once they are in work, it will give them the foothold to get further jobs. Those clauses will be put into all major contracts over £2 million, and you will see people in those categories working.

Wealth Inequality

2. **Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what measures are in place to measure wealth inequality. (AQO 1064/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I am very glad that the Green Party is interested in wealth creation and wealth equality. I thought that that party was against growth and economic activity. It is good to see that interest. The family resources survey gives a comprehensive picture of income levels and includes some

information on financial assets and savings, with a focus on benefit entitlement. The survey commenced in Northern Ireland in 2002 and is conducted annually in GB. The sample size in Northern Ireland is significantly larger than required for UK purposes. It provides robust data, which enables us to decide on a range of policies. We collect the information for that purpose. However, one way of reducing inequality and poverty is through economic growth. I am afraid that the Green Party's record on wanting economic growth is very, very poor.

Mr Agnew: I disagree with the Minister's final comment. Through programmes such as the green new deal, the Green Party has shown how it can look to create jobs in a way that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. Does the Minister accept that a reduction in wealth inequality can lead to improvements in health and education outcomes, as well as reducing crime? If so, what measures to reduce inequalities in income and wealth are in the draft Programme for Government?

Mr Wilson: I am glad that the Member has raised that point, because he is exactly right. More wealth in an economy enables us to deal with many of the social problems that cause crime, ill health, and so forth. However, just in case he thinks that that is the biased view of a Minister who does not have a great deal of love for the Green Party, let me quote Mr Andrew Simms to him. The author of a number of publications written for the Green Party, he wrote 'The New Home Front' and 'A Green New Deal' and said:

> *"one of the most fundamental questions for the transition to a low carbon economy"*

— so much loved by the Green Party, is —

> *"how to maintain the social contract — health and education services and security in retirement — when"*

— and this is the result of the Green Party's policies —

> *"conventional growth becomes constrained."*

Even the green economists recognise that this so-called green new deal, which is supposed to create jobs, employment and wealth, will not work. Mr Simms says that we have to set ourselves on a war footing and should go back to the kind of situation that we had during the Second World War when we had rationing and taxes on luxury goods and other things. So, before it starts giving lectures about how we deal with inequality, the Green Party ought to rethink its economic policies.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thought for a moment that you were going to recall Mr Agnew. *[Laughter.]* Does the Minister agree that the coalition Government's plan for welfare reform will have a devastating impact in terms of wealth inequality? Are there any measures that our Executive can take to mitigate the effects of those changes?

Mr Wilson: I believe that welfare reform is essential because I believe that getting people into work is the one thing that helps them out of poverty. As far as I am concerned, nothing destroys individuals more than making them dependent on the state and on benefits and not giving them the dignity of work. As an Assembly, we should welcome the aspects of welfare reform that are designed to get people into work. However, the Executive have set up a review group to look at welfare reform. We met yesterday and discussed the matter. The welfare reform proposals allow for some localisation of how we deal with some of the changes. We had a very good discussion, and the Executive will look at how we can mitigate some of the detrimental impacts of welfare reform, bearing in mind that, first, we do not have the resources to set up a separate welfare system and, secondly, that changes are needed in welfare to encourage people back into work and to make sure that the large economically inactive population in Northern Ireland is reduced.

Air Passenger Duty

3. **Mr Dickson** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the devolution of air passenger duty powers. *(AQO 1065/11-15)*

Mr Wilson: The draft Programme for Government has committed the Executive to eliminating air passenger duty (APD) on direct long-haul flights. We are in the process of finalising the precise arrangements for the devolution of those powers, and discussions with the Treasury are ongoing. Those will include agreeing which aspects of APD will be devolved, the precise costs and the administrative arrangements for its collection. The current revenues from direct long-haul flights from Northern Ireland, which will be a cost to the block grant, have been estimated by the Government at £5 million. We have not received any estimate of the administrative cost. The Government are also considering the precise legislative changes that are required, but the expectations at present are that the changes will be included in the 2012 finance Bill at Westminster, which, hopefully, should receive Royal Assent by autumn this year.

Mr Speaker: I call Gregory Campbell for a supplementary question. Sorry, I call Stewart Dickson; I apologise to the Member.

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank the Minister for the response. Given that promises that were made to airlines about the transfer of APD are not sufficient to guarantee their future, it is vital that we have a legislative programme and a timetable for the transfer of those responsibilities. Otherwise, airlines such as Continental have made it very clear that, without the appropriate legislation, they will be out of here.

Mr Wilson: You are quite right: the sooner we get certainty on this, the better. However, although the legislation is not through, the measure has been implemented, and air passenger duty is not being collected on those flights. Continental was happy with that and understood the legislative timetable that was involved, and it was well understood that the first opportunity to deal with the issue was the finance Bill this year, which will take until autumn to become law. We still have to have the discussion on which powers will be devolved. My personal view is that, because of reasons that I outlined in the House time and time again, we should seek the devolution of powers for direct long-haul flights only.

2.15 pm

Mr Campbell: On the point about the differentiation between long-haul and short-haul flights, to which the Minister has

just alluded, will he, in conjunction and in discussion with Treasury officials, keep applying pressure to the Treasury and the Government to ensure that air passenger duty is lowered in the United Kingdom to help businesses as well as passengers? The duty is significantly higher in the UK than it is in many of our competing countries, either in the EU or outside it.

Mr Wilson: The Member has raised a totally different issue and one that is outwith the responsibility of this House. It is about the appropriate level, if any, of air passenger duty for the United Kingdom as a whole. On the theme of the previous question, do not forget that air passenger duty is another gift that we got from the Green Party. It is one of the green taxes, and the argument is that we should make air travel in the United Kingdom more expensive in order to cut down carbon emissions, despite the impact that it has on people's ability to go on their holidays, to do business and to travel within the United Kingdom and beyond. My argument is that the aviation industry provides a vital form of transport, especially for a place such as Northern Ireland. Air passenger duty is an inappropriate tax, and to put a green label on it and make us feel that we should all pay it because we should have a guilty conscience about destroying the planet is quite patently absurd.

Mr A Maginness: I hope that the Minister calms down a little. Most people would not describe the air passenger duty as a green tax. It is a revenue-raising measure that the Government have introduced. The Government may well have disguised it as a green tax, but it is not. It has been an unmitigated disaster for Northern Ireland, and it should either be abolished or reduced to a minimal level so that we can compete with our neighbours in the South and elsewhere.

Mr Speaker: Ask a question.

Mr A Maginness: Mr Speaker, I am putting it into context. I ask the Minister to make serious representations to the British Government to have this disastrous tax abolished.

Mr Wilson: It is not just down to the Administration in Northern Ireland, and we have already made such representations. The First Minister and deputy First Minister, when writing about the devolution of air passenger duty, have made known, as have I, their opposition to air passenger duty as a tax per se for the very reasons that the Member has given. I am glad to see that, as time goes on, I am getting more and more converts for the message that I have been giving as a prophet in the wilderness for a number of years. The Member has said that it is not a green tax, but the Green Party says that it is. The Government introduced it as a green tax and still market it as such, and Europe still demands it as a green tax. You cannot run away from the fact that air passenger duty is a tax that was designed to stop people travelling by air because it was deemed that air travel was a bad thing. We in Northern Ireland know that it is essential not only for consumers but for business.

Mr Allister: As one prophet in the wilderness to another, I ask the Minister whether he can shed any light on who is benefiting from the already implemented reduction in air passenger duty. Anecdotally, I see no evidence that the passengers are benefitting, because fares seem to be rising rather than falling. That suggests that the financial beneficiary is the operator. Yes, we want to keep the operation, but we also want to get fairer and better fares for customers. Will the Minister consult with the operator to try to get an insight into how they are spreading the benefit from the reduction in the duty and with whom they are sharing it?

Mr Wilson: I thank the Member for the point that he has made; it seems that there are now two prophets in the wilderness. There will be quite a crowd of them before we finish up. The detail of the costs and the operations of the Continental flight from Northern Ireland are, of course, the responsibility of the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

However, the Member is quite right: the idea behind reducing air passenger duty was to enable Continental, which said that it was operating the service at a loss, to mitigate those losses. As to whether all those losses and more are covered by the reduction in the duty, I really cannot give the Member an answer. I suppose that the price that is charged for the route between Northern Ireland and Newark depends on what the operator considers commercially possible and what people are prepared to pay. I understand that Continental does very well from connecting flight traffic from Northern Ireland beyond Newark, from which the company also raises money. I hope that all those things will be in the mix when deciding how the reduction in the tax is to be apportioned.

INTERREG

4. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the progress made by the five local authority-based groups under the INTERREG programme on applications that are currently being assessed. *(AQO 1066/11-15)*

Mr Wilson: There are currently 15 projects from INTERREG groups at various stages of the assessment process. Of the 15 applications, seven, worth £23·3 million, are currently under assessment. The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) aims to have the applications assessed by the steering committee by the end of March.

A further seven projects have received conditional steering committee approval, and, to proceed to letter-of-offer stage, they will need to meet the various conditions that have been set. Finally, one project — the east border region's tourism development plan — has received steering committee approval but has yet to receive its final letter of offer. The reason for that is that it is above the £2 million threshold so needs Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) approval and scrutiny.

Mr Hilditch: Why has the performance of the local groups been so mixed?

Mr Wilson: There is a host of reasons. I have some sympathy with the local groups. To be frank, the rules were changed on at least two occasions by SEUPB, which held back the ability of groups to bring forward projects. Secondly, the quality of some of the projects has not been as good as was expected. I am sure that the Member, along with all others in the House, would not expect public money, even though it comes from Europe, to be spent on projects that are not seen to be good or value for money. I said to SEUPB that, where there are gaps in knowledge, I want it to work with local groups to show them how to turn applications with

common deficiencies into successful applications, because the one thing that we do not want is to return money.

Mr Murphy: The Minister will be aware of the ongoing concern right across the Assembly and local government that some of the money allocated to SEUPB will not be spent over this budgetary period. Given the review of public administration (RPA), is there a possibility of relooking at the delivery mechanisms to involve local government more formally in the decision-making processes and, in doing so, to reduce bureaucracy? He will be aware, as I am, of the many groups that try to go through the process to get funding approved under the SEUPB programmes only to be frustrated and thwarted by the layers and layers of bureaucracy.

Mr Wilson: The Member makes a good point. It seems that when, as previously, the local groups were responsible for delivery, we did not hit the same problems as we do at the moment. That is probably something that we need to look at. Rather than simply have the groups bring proposals that are to be delivered by SEUPB, perhaps there should be a greater responsibility on the groups to deliver the projects on the ground. They seemed to be successful in doing that in the past. If that is something that needs to be looked at as a means of changing the way in which the INTERREG programme is delivered at local level in future, I am happy that we consider that.

Mr Kinahan: We touched on this just now, but can the Minister guarantee or reassure us that no moneys not spent by SEUPB will be given back to Europe?

Mr Wilson: If money is not spent by SEUPB, it will be given back to Europe, so I cannot guarantee that. However, I can guarantee that officials from my Department sit down with SEUPB weekly. My officials sat down with SEUPB only this week.

SEUPB also sat down with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), because there was criticism there about where the delays were occurring. We have made it clear to SEUPB that, if it needs additional help from economists in getting some advice on assessing projects, we will make that available. So, every effort will be made, and there will be close monitoring of its performance. Of course, I cannot guarantee that if the money is not spent it will not go back. In fact, I know that if it is not spent it will go back, but I assure the House that we will make every effort, as will the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, to ensure that it is not our fault.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for his personal commitment to the programme. Given the experience of many project promoters in trying to draw down the match funding that they require, and given the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's announcement a few months back about a fund that her Department is going to set aside to assist in match funding, have you, as Minister, negotiated any leverage with DETI on SEUPB-type applications?

Mr Wilson: We have. As I said, only this week, or perhaps last week, SEUPB officials, DETI officials and the Minister met to discuss that — at least, I think the Minister was involved — to see what can be done at DETI level to ensure that the process is gone through as quickly as possible. I have to point out that, in the average project, it is taking about a year to get assessments made, and the bulk of that time is as a result of the work that SEUPB has to do. That constitutes nearly 90% of the work, and 10% is DETI work.

Energy Performance Certificates

5. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many energy performance certificates have been issued since their introduction in December 2008. *(AQO 1067/11-15)*

Mr Wilson: From 30 June 2008, when the requirements of the Energy Performance of Buildings (Certificates and Inspections) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008 first came into effect, to 31 December 2011, a total of 151,421 certificates were issued in Northern Ireland.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Do all large public buildings that the public visit, including Parliament Buildings here, display energy performance certificates (EPCs) as required, and does the Department monitor that?

Mr Wilson: It is monitored. I can say that there is 100% compliance for DFP buildings. The compliance rate that I have been given for public buildings — I got an update just this morning — is 90%, which is the highest of all the different sectors.

Mr Copeland: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he explain whether, to ensure competition and fair pricing, he is satisfied that sufficient companies are providing that service?

Mr Wilson: I would have thought that, if there were a gap in the market, especially in the current market, and if excessive profits were available for companies to make, people would step into the market and do that. I know that extensive training went on to enable people to carry out the assessments. I have not been made aware that excessive pricing is taking place or that there is some market failure in getting companies in to ensure competition. One thing that we do not want, of course, is householders having to pay enormous prices to get those certificates. If there is a market failure there somewhere, and if the Member brings it to my attention, I will be more than happy to see what can be done.

Schools: Capital Assets

6. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what discussions he has had with the Minister of Education regarding the recuperation of capital assets following the closure of a school. *(AQO 1068/11-15)*

Mr Wilson: I assume that the Member is referring to the realisation of funds from the disposal of capital assets. I have had no discussions with the Minister of Education specifically on that. However, I encourage all Executive colleagues to maximise opportunities for the realisation of surplus assets. To allow the Member to ask a supplementary question, I will not read the rest of the answer that I was given.

Mr Beggs: Schools in which millions of pounds of public funds have been invested may be closed and subsequently even demolished. That is under way at St Comgall's at present. Will the Minister advise whether there are any clawback clauses that encourage continual public use for publicly funded assets, such as the gymnasium at that school?

Mr Wilson: The Member raises a very important point. Where the recuperation of assets is concerned, when schools are in different ownership, the money will often go back to the owners.

However, where there has been public sector capital investment, depending on the amount and how long ago it took place, there are clawback arrangements. I expect Departments to claw that money back.

2.30 pm

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Speaker: Questions 1 and 15 have been withdrawn and require written answers.

NHS: Trade Unions

2. **Mr T Clarke** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a breakdown of the health service spending on trade union activity for the last available year. (AQO 1079/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Employers in Northern Ireland are bound by legislation to make provision for trade union activity in the workplace. The estimated annual cost, which is calculated on a basic salary basis, to my Department and the wider health service of health and social care staff involvement in trade union activities for 2010-2011 was just over £1·6 million. I will provide the Member with a table setting out a breakdown of that figure.

Mr T Clarke: I thank the Member for that answer. I will deviate slightly if you permit me, Mr Speaker. I saw the press coverage at the weekend of trade unions' comments about Antrim Area Hospital. I commend the staff there for the excellent work that they do. However, the problem there at the moment is typical. Given the trade unions' criticisms about that, what actions is the Minister taking on that backlog?

Mr Poots: I have been to that hospital, and I have met the trade unions at the hospital. More recently, I have been in discussion with the HSC Board. It is working to support the trust, recognising the difficulties that exist. Immediate measures are being put in place to improve services, including enhanced GP cover; greater use of the 65 intermediate care beds in the community to speed up discharge and prevent admission; further exploration of improved access to out-of-hours GP services; improved hospital discharge arrangements; additional emergency theatre time; additional cardiology time for Belfast to enhance the timely transfer of patients; extra nurses; and 20 additional beds in Antrim remaining open. I understand that the latest news is that there are no 12-hour breaches at Antrim A&E, and I trust that that will continue to be the case.

Mr McDevitt: Does the Minister agree that the trade unions will be an exceptionally important partner in the future of the health service? May I ask him to take this opportunity to reassure the House that, in carrying out the reforms that he proposes for the health service, he remains absolutely committed to the principles of social partnership and to the trade unions and staff, who give up their time as workers, being central to the reforms?

Mr Poots: I remain absolutely and totally committed to social partnership. That is demonstrated by the Department's facilitating trade union members to the point of £1·6 million in a year in which we are under very tight fiscal constraints. I wish that that would be reciprocated. I felt that it was not, particularly when the first strike was called. Clear reasons were not set out for that strike in the first instance, and there was very limited support for it among trade union members, as demonstrated when very limited numbers of people turned out on the day. Trade unions should not strike at the drop of a hat; they should seek to negotiate. That is what we are investing this money in. We are not investing it so that trade unions can go on strike easily. I trust that the Member will join me in condemning strikes that are wholly unnecessary and not in the public's best interests.

Mr McCallister: Does the Minister not agree that £1·6 million is a significant amount of money? Although I think we all support working together in social partnership, is it really a core activity of the Department of Health to fund trade union activity?

Mr Poots: Of course, the year that I gave was 2010-2011. I think that the Minister in that year was from the Member's party. So, obviously, his party thought that it was a core activity. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. We will move on.

Meals on Wheels

3. **Mr McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on meals on wheels provision. *(AQO 1080/11-15)*

Mr Poots: Meals on wheels or community meals continue to be provided or arranged by the HSC trusts for vulnerable people where a needs assessment shows that a person is unable to secure a nutritious cooked meal and would therefore be at risk of malnutrition should a meals service not be provided. There are no plans to make substantive changes to the availability of the service to current recipients, and, indeed, the trusts have recently introduced a common set of clear, consistent access criteria. That should promote a clearer understanding of the service and of how and when it should be provided for all those involved in providing and receiving community meals.

Mr McLaughlin: I thank the Minister for the detail in that answer. I am sure that many people will take reassurance from his comments. Will he explicitly confirm that the provision of meals on wheels is contained in the commissioning direction for 2012-13?

Mr Poots: In July 1996, the Department commissioned a review of the charging policy for non-residential personal services, which indicated that the charge for meals on wheels should not be set at a level that would be prohibitive for clients and would reduce the uptake. There has been a reduction in the number receiving meals on wheels in the community of some 1,510 persons over a four-year period. That causes me some concern. I have the notion that, when they have to make spending cuts, some of the trusts may

find meals on wheels an easy option for reducing funding. That is certainly not something that I believe to be right in the context of what we in the Department are doing, where we want to go or what the Compton report has set out as where we should be going. We want to keep people in their own home and in the community. Providing nutritious meals to such people is something that can aid us in doing that.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his support for meals on wheels. If he has the figures to hand, will he tell us the level of provision of meals on wheels in the Western Trust area?

Mr Poots: I do not have the figures for the Western Trust to hand, but I know that in each trust area provision has reduced to some extent. I have visited people who are receiving meals on wheels, and I know that the service is of real benefit to them. We need to ensure that that service can continue and that it is sustainable both for suppliers and those who receive the meals.

Mr Dunne: What is being done in the Department to ensure consistency across the trust areas? Does the Minister recognise that meals on wheels is an excellent service and that it is not just a drop-off service but a social service?

Mr Poots: As part of the exercise carried out by HSC in September, an eligibility criteria document has been agreed and policy-screened, together with the process used to compile the document from existing sources. As a result of that process, we identified the need for an equality impact assessment, but the document has been agreed with the HSC trusts' chief executives. Therefore, I hope that that will help us to achieve the consistency that we need across Northern Ireland.

Mr McCarthy: The Minister has acknowledged that there has been a reduction in the number of people receiving meals on wheels. I would say that it is a dramatic reduction. Does he agree that the needs assessment that has now come into being is perhaps responsible for so many people being outside the criteria for receiving that vital nutritional service daily?

Mr Poots: A needs assessment is absolutely necessary. If it is screening people out, there is a reason for that; it does not necessarily show that the needs assessment is wrong. However, we need to ensure that this is not an easy area in which trusts can make cuts or savings that will ultimately lead to more people ending up in nursing care or in our hospitals. We need to ensure that we can provide quality care to people at home, and this is an element of that service.

Fire Station: Cushendall

4. **Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the business case for a new fire station in Cushendall has not yet been completed. *(AQO 1081/11-15)*

Mr Poots: I understand that the draft business case for the replacement of Cushendall fire station is being assessed through the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service's internal procedures.

Mr McMullan: I thank the Minister for that. Minister, I am sure you are aware that we have been told in writing several times since 2009 and through 2010 that the business case would be completed. It was supposed to be completed before April of last year, then it was supposed to be completed before September. It has got lost out there, once again, wherever it has been lost. Can we get a definite date for the completion of the business case for the station? We cannot take forward the case for funding. The station is still under planning law, 22 years after the construction of a temporary building. Firemen have been hurt in the station because of the state that it is in. I take this occasion to invite you down to have a look at the station.

Mr Poots: The Chief Fire Officer has indicated to the Department that he expects to be in a position to submit the business case to the board by April this year. I expect it to be approved within six months of being submitted to my Department. Repairs were carried out to the roof of Cushendall fire station in December of last year.

Mr Hilditch: Minister, what other plans have you for capital investment in fire stations?

Mr Poots: Planning permission for Omagh fire station has been approved, and I expect that Omagh and Rathfriland fire stations should be completed before 2015. The capital cost of Omagh is projected at around £5·6 million, and the capital cost for Rathfriland fire station is £0·95 million.

Mr Dickson: I want to go back to the issue of Cushendall fire station. Given that the closest fire stations to Cushendall are at Carnlough and Ballycastle, I welcome what the Minister has said. However, can he guarantee that, once the business plan has been completed, the matter will be moved forward urgently by his Department? I take this opportunity to pay tribute to all Fire and Rescue Service personnel.

Mr Poots: We are where we are with Cushendall fire station. It is being progressed, albeit not as quickly as some Members would like, but work is being done on it. I have also received enquiries about a planned new fire station in Ballycastle. Colleagues in north Antrim will be particularly interested. There is a business case for the construction of a newbuild to replace Ballycastle fire station, which has been approved at a capital cost of £2·62 million. At this stage, we do not have capital funding to take that project forward.

Health: Telemonitoring

5. **Mr Spratt** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the benefits of remote telemonitoring services. *(AQO 1082/11-15)*

Mr Poots: A number of studies in the UK and internationally report that remote telemonitoring helps to improve quality of life, reduce hospital admissions, empower patients and alter attitudes towards their conditions. An independent evaluation of local pilot studies was undertaken in Northern Ireland. It found that patients were overwhelmingly positive about the benefits they derived from remote telemonitoring and that it had a positive impact on their quality of life and general health and well-being. The majority of clinicians felt that remote monitoring helped their patients feel less anxious, more reassured and better able to manage their illness, and the large majority of patients felt that it had helped them to reduce their reliance on hospital and nursing staff and had helped reduce their hospital admissions.

I am keen to pursue the use of technology to provide healthcare remotely. In December, I launched the remote

telemonitoring service in Northern Ireland: Telemonitoring NI. That £18 million investment is expected to benefit in the region of 20,000 patients over the next six years. It will provide more and better targeted support to patients, which will enable them to have greater control, learn more about their condition and lead a more independent life.

Mr Spratt: I thank the Minister for his answer. How does the memorandum of understanding with Invest Northern Ireland envisage his Department building on its role with Connected Health?

Mr Poots: We see huge advantages in that. In fact, we are ahead of the game, and there is considerable interest in what we are doing from outside Northern Ireland. There is interest from the United States of America, Finland, Catalonia and other regions. We are very positive about the memorandum of understanding and believe that it will help us to support clinical research in Connected Health in Northern Ireland that will be of use to others. It may be something that may eventually be sold to others, and Invest NI would take the lead on that aspect.

2.45 pm

Mr Nesbitt: As the Minister knows, the remote telemonitoring service was launched with TF3 Consortium as a business partner. Will he tell the House how many potential business partners he has identified across the health service to help to effect financial savings?

Mr Poots: There are considerable opportunities, and people regularly approach us. I have always indicated that I do not have a problem working with the private sector, provided the quality of the service is enhanced, as opposed to diminished, and it delivers value for money. In a series of areas — mental health, the learning-disabled community, care of the elderly and many others — there is expertise that the private sector can bring to the table. Ultimately, the greatest part of our service will be provided through the public service and met at the point of need by the public sector.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answers up to now. Will he indicate whether there are any projected or net savings associated with telemonitoring, as introduced by his Department?

Mr Poots: The real benefits in Connected Health are those in the care of and better outcomes for patients. We have looked at the Whole System Demonstrator programme, which was a two-year research project funded by the English Department of Health, to find out how technology can help people to manage their health while maintaining their independence. The early headline figures on telehealth indicated that there was a 15% reduction in A&E visits, a 20% reduction in emergency admissions, a 14% reduction in elective admissions, a 14% reduction in bed days, an 8% reduction in tariff costs and a 45% reduction in mortality rates. That has obvious benefits for the person. While it benefits the person, we can see financial benefits too, because people not spending days in beds in hospitals is extremely beneficial from the Department's financial perspective.

Health Promotion

6. **Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what percentage of the healthcare budget is currently spent on health promotion. *(AQO 1083/11-15)*

Mr Poots: Health promotion activity is inherent within and across all aspects of health and social care provision in Northern Ireland. I am committed to increasing the percentage of my Department's overall budget that is spent on health promotion. For example, my Department plans to invest £119 million on health promotion activities in 2011-12, which represents an increase of £28 million or 26% on planned spend in the previous financial year. My commitment to increasing health promotion spend is also evident in the draft Programme for Government and in the forthcoming development of a new public health framework, both of which will strengthen the drive to improve the health and well-being of the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for his commitment to increasing the amount spent on health promotion. However, does he accept that we are considerably behind other regions of the UK as well as the Republic and even further behind Scandinavian countries?

Mr Poots: That is fairly obvious; otherwise, we would not have invested 26% more in public health this year.

Ms Gildernew: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Does the Minister believe that, given the health benefits not only to children's immune systems but in preventing obesity, enough is being spent on the promotion of breastfeeding?

Mr Poots: Without getting into specifics, the Public Health Agency looks at all those issues, and huge benefits result from children being breastfed. It is something that we want to encourage. For young mothers, even for a short period, it can have significant benefits, and the longer children are breastfed, the better. We will be doing more work on it and will encourage the Public Health Agency to continue to support it.

Ms Lewis: How does the intended spend on public health compare with the situation a decade ago?

Mr Poots: Over the past eight years, spend on health promotion has increased from £34 million in 2003-04 to £119 million in this financial year. That is a significant investment and reflects the Department's commitment to a series of strategies that seek to foster conditions that allow the people of Northern Ireland to be healthy and make healthy choices. The increase in health promotion expenditure is due to investments in a range of programmes, such as the drug strategy, action to combat drugs, suicide awareness, the tobacco strategy, vaccination programmes, investing for health and telemonitoring. There has always been an awareness of the importance of health promotion and disease prevention. The Health Promotion Agency existed for 20 years prior to the formation of the Public Health Agency, which has given extra impetus to this important part of public health.

Mrs Overend: Will the Minister outline how much is being spent on educating firms or businesses about the cost of accidents in the workplace? Does he feel that more needs to be done in that area?

Mr Poots: I am loath to venture into that area. The Health and Safety Executive does not come under the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, but we pick up a lot of the problems thereafter. We can only encourage people to take action to ensure that they work safely. I know that the Member comes from an agricultural background,

and that is an area where there are a lot of challenges, particularly for older men. A lot of incidents happen on our farms, and we need to encourage people to work safely.

Mental Health: Perinatal Services

7. **Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what perinatal services are available for mothers suffering from mental health-related illnesses. *(AQO 1084/11-15)*

Mr Poots: As with all mental health patients, the aim is to treat within the community, in line with the recommendations of the Bamford review. Mothers who require mental health care will, therefore, receive it within existing community mental health services. For those requiring inpatient care, trusts have protocols in place for treatment in existing psychiatric hospitals.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for his response. There are some difficulties when a mother and child are separated, particularly when the mother is in hospital. Does he have plans to establish a mother and baby specialist unit at the proposed psychiatric units in Belfast?

Mr Poots: It has been identified that we could do that. Obviously, it is a very difficult area and a difficult issue. The best place for a child's early months is not necessarily a psychiatric unit. It has to be designed in a particular way so that it does not appear to be a psychiatric unit but still has connections, so that the skill base is there to support the mother through that difficult time and, hopefully, restore her to full health and strength. However, that has to be done in a very specialised way. The design has been looked at, and I trust that, if we proceed with the project, all of that will be taken into account.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answers. Has he met any campaigners in favour of a stand-alone unit?

Mr Poots: Yes. I met the chair and representatives of the Royal Jubilee Maternity Liaison Committee in November last year. The representatives asked for consideration to be given to the design and capacity of the new Belfast inpatient mental health facility to enable it to provide inpatient care for mothers with severe mental health conditions. We have asked for the provision of perinatal beds to be considered in the business case for the new unit.

Accident and Emergency Services: Belfast

8. **Mr A Maskey** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact on accident and emergency services in Belfast of the closure of the A&E department at Belfast City Hospital. *(AQO 1085/11-15)*

Mr Poots: For safety and quality reasons, it was imperative to put in place temporary changes to the provision of accident and emergency services in the Belfast Trust. I take this opportunity to thank health and social care (HSC) staff for their hard work and dedication. A range of measures to improve the quality of decision-making in emergency departments (ED) and to enhance both ED capacity and the throughput of hospital patients are in place. They include an enhanced consultant presence in ED, medical admissions units and greater access to short-stay unit beds on both the Mater and Royal sites, with an acute medical assessment unit in the City Hospital to facilitate direct admissions from the community. Enhanced care pathways for certain chronic conditions have been developed. Additional capacity for the assessment of cancer patients in the Cancer Centre has been made.

In addition, there is greater access to eye emergency services on the RVH site, and there has been enhanced ambulance cover across all sites. Overall, the total number of ED attendances in the Belfast Trust is similar to that for the same period last year, but acute admissions are rising. That is a reflection of increasing demand on our services and the complexity of many patients presenting to ED. I acknowledge some difficulties in access, and there is still a need to improve performance on the four- and 12-hour waiting-time targets.

The HSC system needs major reform if we are to cope with increasing demand and provide a high-quality, sustainable service. Permanent changes to accident and emergency services will be subject to public consultation as soon as possible in 2012, starting with the Lagan Valley Hospital and followed by the Belfast Trust proposals at a later date.

I want to remind the public again that attendance at an ED should occur only if it is absolutely necessary.

Mr A Maskey: I thank the Minister for his fairly detailed response. I appreciate that he may be unable to elaborate, but I am particularly concerned about some of the reports over the Christmas and new year period, when there was a lot of adverse public and media commentary referring to all A&E units being oversubscribed and to directives given to send people home from hospital admissions. There were also reports of fairly high levels of staff absenteeism. I appreciate that the Minister may not be able to respond to that today, but can he give us an update?

Mr Poots: I can give an update. Flows in the Royal hospital improved over and above what the Royal and City hospitals had been doing in previous months. There was a quicker turnaround of patients. Unfortunately, in December, that fell away to some extent. We always get winter pressures. For example, in December 2010, the number of patients waiting for four hours and under was 72·9. That dropped to 63·3, which was disappointing. This December, the number of patients waiting for more than 12 hours rose from 40 and 83 in the previous year — 123 taking into account the two hospitals — to 170. Again, that is disappointing. We have not had to deal with any catastrophes in that respect. The hospital has been able to cope, but decisions have been taken in view of a lot of complicated cases coming in that required bed space. So, a considerable amount of the flow coming through has been dealt with without a lot of difficulty. Additional admissions have posed some difficulties, and that has been demonstrated. However, the issue here is not with A&E but with admissions to the hospitals and bed capacity in the hospitals.

Mr Speaker: Once again, I remind Members who want to ask a supplementary question that it is important that they rise continually in their place. I know that some Members have difficulty doing that, but that is the only way in which you will get to ask a supplementary question.

Mr Storey: I assure you, Mr Speaker, my difficulty in getting up has no relation to age.

I thank the Minister for his answer on the specific issues relating to the Belfast hospital. On a wider issue, he is well aware of the concerns we have raised around the Causeway Hospital and staff. Staff are an important and key element to the delivery of an A&E service. What action has the Minister taken to permit more doctors to come into the health service from, for example, the Indian subcontinent, particularly to work in our emergency departments?

Mr Poots: Emergency medicine is one of the specialties in which we have had difficulty recruiting sufficient doctors, particularly junior doctors, and the changes to the immigration rules that were introduced in 2008 are the biggest contributing factor. Despite a recruitment exercise in India, securing the necessary paperwork for work in the UK created long delays, and those doctors identified secure posts elsewhere.

We find that situation unacceptable, and we have raised it with the Immigration Minister, Damian Green. In a response to us in December last year, he made it clear that the rules would not be changed and that the annual limits would still be applied. He is firmly of the view that there should be no separate shortage occupation list for Northern Ireland.

3.00 pm

The overriding concern from their perspective is the need to reduce net migration. There is no acceptance that recruitment difficulties exist to the extent that we have quoted as being due to the complexity of the immigration rules. We do not really accept that, and officials from my Department have met officials from the UK Border Agency. We encourage the Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency to also meet the UK Border Agency. We are quite prepared to facilitate that to ensure that we are getting the necessary flow of doctors to help and support us and provide us with an excellent service, as they have been doing for many years. Those doctors learn excellent skills that they can take back to their own countries.

Mr Speaker: That ends Question Time. I ask the House to take its ease as we move on to the next item of business.

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

Executive Committee Business

Protection from Tobacco (Sales from Vending Machines) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I beg to move

> *That the draft Protection from Tobacco (Sales from Vending Machines) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.*

I seek the Assembly's approval to introduce the aforementioned statutory rule. Subject to the Assembly's approval, this rule will ban the sale of tobacco products from vending machines in Northern Ireland. The main aim of the legislation is to prevent children and young people from being able to access tobacco from a largely unsupervised source.

Members will recall agreeing in March 2009 to the extension to Northern Ireland of certain tobacco-related provisions in the Westminster Health Act 2009. Those provisions provided my Department with powers to lay four separate sets of regulations relating to the display of tobacco products in retail outlets and the sale of tobacco from vending machines. All four sets of draft regulations were the subject of a public consultation in the latter half of 2010, and a summary of the consultation responses was published on my Department's website on 23 August 2011. All consultation responses were carefully considered and helped to inform the final regulations.

Today, I have moved the Protection from Tobacco (Sales from Vending Machines) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012. This statutory rule is very brief and contains only two regulations. The first provides that the sale of tobacco from vending machines is prohibited, and the second provides important clarity on who is liable in the case of a breach of the legislation. For the purposes of this legislation, the person who controls or is responsible for the management of a premises where a vending machine is sited would commit an offence if tobacco sales were made from such a machine once the legislation has commenced.

The regulations will bring Northern Ireland into line with the rest of the UK. Similar regulations were commenced in England on 1 October 2011, Wales will be introducing a ban on tobacco vending machines from 1 February 2012 and Scotland is in the process of making legislation to that effect.

Members will be aware that smoking is well recognised as the single greatest cause of premature death and avoidable illness in Northern Ireland, claiming some 2,300 lives here each year. Smoking is a major risk factor for coronary heart disease, strokes, cancer and other circulatory diseases, and it can lead to blindness. Those diseases are also key causes of disability and have life-changing impacts, not only for sufferers but for their families.

Smoking is also a major cause of health inequalities and is the principal cause of the gap in life expectancy between affluent people and those on low incomes. A person living in one of the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland is twice as likely to die from lung cancer as someone who lives in

the least deprived area of Northern Ireland. There has been considerable progress on tobacco control in recent years, and the rate of smoking prevalence has declined over the past decade.

However, our smoking prevalence rates remain higher than those in England and Wales, with almost one in four adults still smoking. That figure rises to one in three in some areas of Northern Ireland. Significantly, a recent survey showed that 82% of adult smokers in Northern Ireland took up the habit in their teens, and 8% of children aged between 11 and 16 are regular smokers. Therefore, it is clear that, if we are to achieve a significant reduction in smoking prevalence, we must deter young people from taking up the habit.

Children and young people are particularly vulnerable consumers in that they are, generally, unaware of the long-term health implications of tobacco use. By the time they reach adulthood and the dangers are more apparent, they have become dependent on nicotine and joined the majority of smokers who would like to quit but find it difficult.

The young persons' behaviour and attitude survey carried out in Northern Ireland reveals that vending machines are a usual source of tobacco for 14% of smokers aged between 11 and 16. Evidence from test purchasing exercises in England before a ban was introduced there showed that under-18s were able to make illegal purchases from 58% of vending machines tested and that one quarter of those machines were sited in unsupervised areas. Although a similar exercise has not been conducted in Northern Ireland, we have no reason to believe that the situation here is any different.

Removing tobacco vending machines will not only remove an easily accessible source of tobacco from underage children but will support the thousands of smokers who try to quit each year, thereby linking the legislation with two main objectives in my Department's new tobacco control strategy, which is due to be published this month. That strategy will retain the key objectives from the previous tobacco action plan. Those are prevention, with fewer smokers starting the habit; cessation, which is helping more smokers to quit; and protection from harm caused by second-hand smoke. The Public Health Agency will be responsible for implementing the new strategy and will, of course, continue to explore with the statutory and voluntary sector agencies how best to discourage young people from adopting the smoking habit.

I stated that I will lay four new sets of tobacco control regulations. The other three relate to banning the display of tobacco products at the point of sale in retail outlets, thereby protecting children from exposure to tobacco advertising in the form of brightly lit, colourful gantries found behind the tills in most newsagents and convenience stores. Those will be commenced in Northern Ireland in the latter half of 2012 for large shops and in 2015 for smaller shops. I also intend to bring forward proposals this year that will impose sanctions on those retailers who persist in selling tobacco to those who are underage.

My Department provided resources to facilitate the appointment of additional enforcement officers to maximise compliance with the smoke-free legislation in 2007. That funding continues and is linked to enhanced enforcement activity on underage sales. That will include any enforcement activity required to implement the vending machine regulations.

We do not permit the widespread sale through vending machines of other age-restricted products such as alcohol, fireworks or lottery tickets. Therefore, it is entirely appropriate that tobacco should not be available in that way. I trust, therefore, that I have the Assembly's support in prohibiting the sale of tobacco, which is a very harmful and addictive product, from vending machines. I commend the motion to Members.

Ms Gildernew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister explained the purpose of the draft statutory rule, which requires the affirmation of the Assembly before it can come into operation, and he described in considerable detail the difficulties with tobacco and its accessibility.

I will add to what he said in that I certainly feel that a lot of young girls buy cigarettes in an attempt to suppress appetite or not put on weight. There seems to be an increase in young girls and young women smoking, so anything we can do to try to prevent the development of tobacco addiction is certainly to be welcomed. This rule will, essentially, ban the sale of cigarettes and other tobacco products from automated vending machines, with the aim of preventing children and young people who are underage from being able to access cigarettes.

The Health Committee is fully supportive of that goal. However, in scrutinising the legislation, we were mindful that the change in the law will have an impact on businesses. The Committee received representations from vending machine businesses, and they raised the issue of compensation. A regulatory impact assessment has been done on the legislation. There are 1,831 tobacco vending machines at an approximate value of £375 each, which makes the total one-off cost to the industry approximately £686,000. The Committee subsequently wrote to the Department to seek clarification on the matter of compensation. The Department confirmed that no compensation would be offered as it was of the view that operators had been allowed sufficient time to prepare for the changes.

On balance, the Committee was content that the benefits of the legislation outweigh the limited financial loss to businesses. The Committee, therefore, following its meeting on 5 October 2011, advised the Department that it was content that the legislation be prepared. The Committee then considered the draft regulations at our meeting on 14 December 2011 and recommended that they be affirmed by the Assembly. I support the motion on behalf of the Committee.

Mr Wells: I enthusiastically support the motion. I was the Chair of the Health Committee when this issue was initially discussed. There was considerable enthusiasm amongst members then for the proposed legislation, and that continued after the recent election. We heard very clear evidence of the link between accessibility of cigarettes to younger people through unregulated vending machines and people taking up smoking. We felt that the statistics, as the Minister indicated, were very clear. Unfortunately, it is a route that younger people use to access cigarettes and

get on to the habit, which can last a lifetime and have quite shocking consequences.

Several months ago, the previous Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety confirmed, in response to a question for written answer, that there were 2,300 deaths a year in Northern Ireland as a result of cigarette-related diseases. Indeed, that figure was confirmed recently by the present Minister in a debate on the Compton report. Many of those people die agonising, long, painful deaths as a result of lung cancer. As I said in a previous debate, I recently witnessed two people whom I knew very well die from lung cancer. It is absolutely ghastly. Anything that the House can do to prevent young people getting hooked on tobacco has to be applauded. Therefore, the legislation should be given a clean bill of health from the Assembly and allowed to pass.

We realise that this is only part of a package of measures that we hope are forthcoming. I understand that the Minister is about to publish his tobacco strategy. The sorts of issues that I think that we all want to see — I think that some are guaranteed — include progress on the banning of the display cabinets that are so prevalent in every shop and supermarket in the country so that they no longer promote the brands of cigarettes and encourage people to smoke. Also, we hope to eventually see a ban on smoking in cars, which was debated in the Assembly a few months ago. There was clear cross-community support for that, particularly when children are present. There is an unanswerable view that we have to tackle this issue. We cannot allow young children in particular to be exposed to tobacco smoke in those confined spaces.

I hope that we eventually go down the route of plain paper packaging for cigarettes. In other words, you will not have the glamorous bright red or blue packet or whatever it is promoting cigarettes as cool; the packaging will be brown and plain. Perhaps the only photograph on them will be of a lung that is taken from someone who has died of lung cancer as a result of smoking. That is the sort of message that we need to get out. The Minister, quite rightly, quoted the statistic that 82% of the people in Northern Ireland who smoke are desperate to get off the habit. Almost everyone I talk to who smokes wishes that they did not. Therefore, we have to facilitate those people and make it more difficult for them to obtain cigarettes and easier to give up. That is the carrot-and-stick approach that is required.

A manufacturer of vending machines from Londonderry wrote to us to say that this would have an effect on his business. The reality, sadly, is that there may be 1,000 vending machines in Northern Ireland, but there is already a market for second-hand vending machines in eastern Europe and the Indian subcontinent. It is sad that we will be exporting those to other countries, where more young children can access cigarettes, perhaps illegally, but there is a market for second-hand machines. Indeed, one of the reasons why the Department delayed the implementation of the regulations was to allow those machines to be sold on elsewhere or scrapped or whatever.

3.15 pm

The industry was given lots of warning that this was coming. It had time to adjust and move to an export-led market rather than sell in the British Isles. Therefore, it frankly has no excuse for being caught unawares. I do not believe that the small cost involved can possibly be equated to the cost to the health service should we allow more young people to become addicted to tobacco and develop long-term chronic conditions, the treatment of which would cost the health service a fortune. I therefore wish the legislation a fair wind. I hope that it can be implemented as soon as possible and that we have seen the last of such vending machines in our shops, restaurants, pubs and elsewhere.

Mr McCallister: Like others, I warmly welcome the legislation. It will continue the work of the Department, the Minister, his predecessors and the Committee, and it will assist the drive to do all that we can to rid our society of the scourge of cigarettes and tobacco smoke. I see that Ms Bradley is looking very guilty.

Smoking is a real problem for our society. The stats that the Minister gave are very compelling. We heard about people who are addicted to tobacco, their struggle to get off it and the impact on their family's finances. The cost to the public health agenda is enormous, and the effect on people's health is dramatic. The House has a real and pressing duty to address the issue. I welcome not only the regulations but the package of measures that the Minister spoke about. We should and must support the measures.

Mr Wells talked about the suffering that smoking causes individuals, and it is a telling story. We really have to get to grips with the problem and tackle it in our society by putting in place measures that address it and keep our children safe. A motion of mine was debated in the Assembly a few months ago, and I was encouraged by the support that it drew from right across the Chamber. This is something that we must do, and I am encouraged by the fact that the Minister acted on what was said in that debate and is following up on it. When the Minister introduces legislation to that effect, we will welcome it. I warmly support the motion.

Mr Durkan: I welcome the initiative and, indeed, any initiative that makes tobacco less accessible to children and less attractive to adults. The legislation will bring us into line with where Great Britain is going.

A couple of Members spoke about the impact that the legislation will have on businesses dependent on vending machines. I implore the Minister to talk to his colleague the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, because she might be able to work with the companies concerned, one of which is in my constituency, to discuss the resale of such machines or their alternative uses. The machines could distribute healthier products — nicotine gum or something along those lines. That option could be explored.

We welcome the Minister's ongoing commitment to tackling nicotine addiction and the numerous serious diseases and conditions associated with it, which not only place a huge financial strain on the Department but cause an immeasurable amount of suffering for individuals and their families. We support the motion.

Mr McCarthy: Like all other Members, I fully support the motion. I fully concur with the sentiments of the Health Committee, its Chairperson and its Deputy Chairperson. Any measures that the Assembly can take to keep our young people free from tobacco from a very early age are well worth the effort. The Northern Ireland Assembly has led by example. I wish the measure every success.

I hope that, as generations come along, ever fewer young people will take up the disgusting habit, and I speak as someone who smoked for some years. I remember the first fag that I lit. When I put it in my mouth, my elder brother said, "You will live to regret that." I dismissed his words totally and absolutely. However, I did regret it. His words came true. Thankfully, I was able to quit the habit a number of years ago. I wish every success to all smokers who try to quit.

The legislation will make it more difficult for young people to smoke. Young people start and, before they know it, smoking, like any other habit, has taken over. I welcome the legislation.

Mr Poots: I thank the Chairperson, the Deputy Chairperson and, indeed, the other members of the Health Committee for their contribution to the debate. I welcome the widespread support for the legislation. I recognise that banning the sale of tobacco from vending machines will not in itself solve the problem of children smoking. However, it will complement current enforcement activity and ongoing prevention work that is being undertaken by many agencies, which include the Public Health Agency, health and social care trusts, the education sector, the voluntary sector and others. The regulations represent another important milestone in our pursuance of the long-term goal, which is a tobacco-free society in Northern Ireland.

To those outside the Chamber who will carp about a nanny state and that sort of thing, I want to make it absolutely clear that we are not anti-smoker; we are anti-smoking. We want to ensure that as few people as possible start smoking in the first instance. As Mr McCarthy quite rightly pointed out, it is extremely addictive and detrimental to people's health. I do not see how preventing people from taking actions that can lead to early death and huge health problems is being a nanny state. Very often, healthcare provision for people who have smoked for many years has to be paid for by others. I make no apology whatsoever for being anti-smoking. I will continue to campaign against that activity and to create circumstances that will make it more difficult to smoke.

Mr Wells mentioned smoking in cars. We will give that due consideration over the next number of months. We will go to public consultation later in 2012. We will seek the public's views on options for the implementation and enforcement of such a ban. That approach is being taken to ensure that the public considers the issue in a holistic manner and to provide comprehensive information to all who are involved in the implementation and enforcement of any such legislation.

I welcome the support for the statutory rule. I trust that that will be reflected when the House votes.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That the draft Protection from Tobacco (Sales from Vending Machines) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.*

Motion made:

> *That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker.]*

Adjournment

Castlewellan Forest Park: Arboretum

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that the proposer of the topic for debate will have 15 minutes. The Minister will have 10 minutes to respond. All other Members who wish to speak will have seven minutes.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Business Committee and my party for selecting the topic of the restoration of the arboretum in Castlewellan. It is a very important subject for discussion. Annesley garden and the national arboretum in Castlewellan forest park means a lot to the people of Castlewellan, South Down and further afield.

The walled Annesley garden, dating from 1740, provides a central focal point for the national arboretum. This magnificent collection of trees and shrubs, set in beautiful surroundings, also incorporates fountains, ponds and ornamental greenhouses.

In terms of the size, age and condition of the trees, the collection ranks among the top three arboreta in these isles and the finest in Ireland. Mr Terence Reeves-Smyth, who is a senior inspector in the built heritage division of the Environemt Agency, believes Annesley garden to be one of the most important in Europe today.

In 2005, the entire built heritage at Annesley garden received a B listing. That included the entire wall surrounding the 12-acre site and the two buildings built into the walls — the slaughterhouse and the hanging house. It is not as bad as it sounds; they were used for venison. I know that landlords were bad, but I do not think they carried out anything like that in Castlewellan.

A trust will be able to avail itself of funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to develop a plan for Annesley garden and will eventually get funding to restore the glasshouses. The Architectural Heritage Fund feels that it can secure funding to restore the slaughterhouse and the hanging house for use as holiday lets.

Anyone who has recently visited Annesley garden and Castlewellan arboretum will be in no doubt that the garden and the important collection are in serious decline. The gardens were purchased by the Government in 1967, and they are currently under the ownership of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and managed by Forest Service. Our world-renowned arboretum is now scruffy and overgrown and needs a lot of care and attention. Very little funding has been dedicated over the past decade to the restoration and care of the arboretum, and, in my opinion, we should be showcasing our park, restoring it for the world to see, and making the walks striking and informative to local people and visitors alike.

The fact is that the Forest Service does not have the necessary funding to bring Annesley garden and the glasshouses in Castlewellan forest park up to standard. We all understand that the Department and the Executive have limited resources, and there are more pressing issues

in every Department. Every day of the week we hear that in regard to education, job creation or health. Therefore, we understand that, and the people from South Down also understand that.

As an Assembly, we have to find the solution. I am proposing a joint initiative between Down District Council, the Forest Service and a trust. The Annesley garden trust will be formed very soon, and it is being spearheaded by Simon Moore, who is a native of Castlewellan. Simon has been involved in garden design in England, where he lives, but he is looking to come back.

The trust will be made up of gardening experts, council representatives, the Tourist Board and built heritage representatives, and there will be a place for others with certain expertise who can bring certain additional qualities to the trust. Obviously, there will be a place for the volunteer group, which has been carrying out maintenance in the park. They are a dedicated group of people who are known as the arboretum restoration committee (ARC), and I pay tribute to them. They do that on a totally voluntary basis, and the huge amount of work they have put in has to be recognised and put on record.

There will be an opportunity for local people to become friends of the trust. They will be able to volunteer and eventually gain admittance to the arboretum in exchange for contributing a couple of hours of voluntary work a week. That is the sort of repayment in kind that the trust is looking at.

There will be opportunities for unemployed people and citizens recovering from illness to be trained in horticulture.

The partnership model will allow various pots of funding to be used, including the Heritage Lottery Fund and the rural development programme, which is under the guidance of the Minister.

3.30 pm

I had the pleasure of working on the Forestry Act 2010. That Act was shaped to develop leisure activities in forests, in partnership with councils and community groups, to benefit local communities, to create jobs and to boost our tourism product. We need to enhance our product so that it can reach its full potential. For example, the development of an adventure playground in Castlewellan forest park would help children to engage with nature and woodlands and add to the family experience. Furthermore, the development of a family-designed mountain biking trail has received a letter of offer of funding. That is an example of the council, the Forest Service and DARD working together with NITB and CAAN to deliver a world-class facility. That trail is out to tender for design.

From correspondence with the RSPB, I know that it aims to work with local stakeholders in the community to establish red kite trails for walkers and cyclists. That project is a significant tourist attraction in the area, and it could be enhanced if new signage for the arboretum and the surrounding area were to be installed. The RSPB also strongly supports the restoration proposals. The arboretum is a major tourist attraction in its own right and an economic driver. Another major attraction is the Peace Maze. It is the world's largest permanent hedge maze, and it represents a path to a peaceful future for Ireland.

Others in support of a partnership approach include Mr Michael Lipsett, the director of the recreation department in Down District Council. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has stated that it wants a trust to be set up to take on the restoration of the whole national arboretum and not just the Annesley garden. Dr Sally Montgomery, the chief executive of W5 at the Odyssey, met Malcolm Beatty, the chief executive of the Forest Service, to secure the future of that world-renowned garden. She also favours the partnership approach that I mentioned. The National Trust and the Mourne Heritage Trust also support the project and the principle of forming a trust and providing a partnership approach.

The public demand that the issue be dealt with and a satisfactory resolution found. When the Forest Service took over from the Annesley family in 1967, some 60 to 80 people were employed in the forest park. Today, three people look after the same area, which gives you some idea of the pressures that the Forest Service is under. In the past, many who worked in forests throughout the North did so under public relief schemes for the unemployed. At times of high unemployment, people were always sent to the forest for temporary work solutions. We are almost getting back to that situation now, and there is probably a need for a similar scheme through which people can get work in forests.

I give full credit to the staff of Castlewellan forest park. As I said, they are low in number, but they have maintained the magnificent tree collection. The specimens are in excellent condition, and it is a great credit to them. Today, we need horticulturists to restore the Annesley gardens. I give a special note of thanks to Mr Pat McVeigh. He lives in Rostrevor but is a native of Castlewellan and, over the years, has campaigned for a restoration programme. He deserves a bit of a mention.

The future of the national arboretum in Castlewellan is at a crossroads. The Forest Service cannot behave like a dog in a manger. The restoration of the arboretum is not within its grasp, and it will not get the resources to bring that about. Therefore, there is an onus on the Forest Service to let go, provide a leasing opportunity and work in partnership with the council, the trust and other organisations interested in restoring that fine facility. I do not think that the Department or the Forest Service will be unwilling to engage, but I am interested in the Minister's view on that. We want the trust to have some sort of leasing arrangement whereby they can draw down a cocktail of funds. The Department and the council cannot do it alone. We need everybody working together to ensure that we can draw down the revenue from various sources.

There are many elements to the restoration of the arboretum, such as the re-landscaping of the garden paths and the restoration of the glasshouses and the two listed buildings. Those are major projects in their own right, and we will be looking for funding proposals for each of them from various sources.

There are media opportunities for the trust to record the restoration project. That will provide a good opportunity to promote and showcase the forest park, south Down and the island of Ireland in general. We are showing what we have to offer on our island.

There is a good opportunity for working with local communities. That is something that groups have to do if they want to avail themselves of grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund. It has to be about telling a story and about the huge voluntary contributions from and huge efforts by local communities to guarantee funding, particularly the secondary funding. I am keen that the project is opened up to local communities. It is about taking ownership of the park and educating our young people and giving them a grasp of what nature is about.

The majority of us are from a rural background. We are very privileged to live in the countryside and in areas of outstanding natural beauty. In my area of south Down we have forest parks, open spaces, mountain ranges and beaches. A lot of people do not have those opportunities. It would be useful to engage young people from all walks of life throughout the North and throughout Ireland and get them involved in the project. It might be that we could bring young offenders into the programme and give them an opportunity to make a contribution to society — the break that they might need — and give them a new direction. I see lots of opportunities in the proposal to train volunteers and to get people back to work. The big one is fundraising. There are a number of subcommittees working in the trust to look at different aspects and to bring in people with different qualities, allowing them to work together inclusively. That is important. Everyone has a role to play in restoring the arboretum. People from all walks of life have talked to me, having seen some newspaper articles, and have said that they would be interested in doing a couple of hours of voluntary work.

We need to look at the partnership approach and then examine the leasing agreement and draw down the funds. The restoration programme must commence now, because it is an injustice to allow such a world-class facility to fall into disrepair when we have a solution through the formation of the partnership. I thank everyone who has dedicated time and effort in the garden at the arboretum, including the ARC volunteers who have carried out a lot of work over many years. I pay tribute to them all.

Mr Wells: We all support the sentiments expressed by Mr Clarke on the issue. I am a frequent visitor to Castlewellan and to the forest park. I remember walking round the lake at Castlewellan and encountering a local person who stopped and said, “I could not do your job as an MLA for all the tea in China”. When I asked him what he did, he told me that he was an undertaker. It is interesting that there is someone who thinks that stitching up dead bodies is more interesting than the work that we do as MLAs. Nevertheless, I think that we can prove today that we can be united on this issue.

Castlewellan forest park, the lake, the arboretum and the gardens are some of the greatest assets in Down district and, indeed, all of south Down. It is a tragedy that they have been allowed to fall into disrepair. I was fortunate enough to visit it when it was at its full glory many years ago, and it was an absolutely outstanding attraction in its time. However, I appreciate the difficulties that Forest Service has, in that its role is primarily to provide access and timber, and it is not mainly a role of being gardeners or maintaining — *[Interruption.]* Sorry; that is my fault. Its role is not to be gardeners or protectors of specimen trees but mostly to produce timber and provide access.

I see opportunities in what is being proposed by the trust, but I also see difficulties. I have no doubt whatsoever that, if the trust gets up and running and gets a leasing agreement with Forest Service, the capital funding will be available. I have found many times that, if you go to bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Tourist Board, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment or the International Fund for Ireland, you will get capital funding to upgrade and provide excellent facilities at somewhere such as the arboretum in Castlewellan. The problem does not come with that aspect but with revenue.

There are so many projects in Northern Ireland where enthusiastic groups have got together and done magnificent work in producing a cocktail of funding. The obvious example is the Saint Patrick Centre in Downpatrick, which was opened debt-free in 2001. It had been entirely paid for by various statutory funding bodies, and I congratulate Down District Council and the others who achieved that. However, the problem, as we have discovered with the Saint Patrick Centre and every other tourist attraction, is the question of who pays for the ongoing running costs.

The difficulty I have discovered is that very few bodies are prepared to pay the cost of staff salaries, insurance, heating and so on. Such funding is almost impossible to obtain. I have spoken to representatives of the trust. I admire them, and I have said that I will give them my full support to get a business case developed and to try to enter into negotiations with Forest Service and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. However, I have warned them of the huge difficulties that they face on the issue of revenue. They have some exciting proposals for some form of holiday accommodation, events and tours. That is great news, but I ask this question: who will use those facilities on a wet Tuesday morning in November? You need to have the answer to that question because your costs will continue throughout the shoulder months from October to March, and you will still have to pay your salaries and fixed costs even though next to no income will be coming in to meet those costs. If you happen to have a very wet summer, you might find that your revenue in the peak months practically disappears. So, when they are looking at their proposals, they have to consider the sustainability of the project and how to get the money to ensure that it can continue.

I do not want to pour cold water on it. It is an excellent idea that will be enormously beneficial to the people of south Down and to the wider tourist trade of Northern Ireland, the Irish Republic and, indeed, even further afield. However, there has to be a sense of realism here. I suspect that, in the present economic conditions, it is unlikely that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development will have the resources to provide long-term guarantees of staffing and funding for this project, at least not up to a level that will sustain it. It may be able to provide partial funding, but there has been a dramatic reduction in staffing not only in Castlewellan but in all the forest parks in Northern Ireland, and they are now being run with a skeleton staff.

We have had various meetings about other issues, and Mr Clarke is aware of the problem of security for those who camp in Forest Service forest parks in south Down and of the difficulty that Forest Service has in obtaining the funding to provide security. When only three members of staff cover that huge area, they are stretched extremely thinly, and I cannot see much scope for extra resources to employ

people to do the intensive work needed when you are looking after an arboretum and a garden.

I had the privilege of working for 10 years with the National Trust at Saintfield's Rowallane garden. You need to go somewhere like that, which is quite equivalent, to see the intensive amount of labour that is required to keep a garden running and to realise that this is not a one man and his dog operation but one that will require several staff to work 365 days a year. However, politics is the art of the possible, and I am sure that, with a bit of thought, we can get round the problems. They have to be faced, and we have to match the enthusiasm of the group that is, quite rightly, trying to pioneer this with the cold, hard reality of the economic situation we are in. The difficulty is in maintaining those facilities all year round, when the costs keep mounting.

I will listen with interest. Mr Clarke said that he suspects that he knows some of what the Minister will say. I suspect that he knows all of what the Minister will say, or he would not have put the subject down for discussion in the first place. It will be interesting to see what the Minister says about the project. I hope that we are successful and that the doubts that I expressed can be confounded. I will be delighted to be there on the day when they cut the ribbon to reopen the arboretum to the public.

3.45 pm

Mr McCallister: I very much welcome the debate. If Mr Wells enjoyed his time gardening so much, I would be happy to assist in seeing whether we could get him back gardening full time.

I thank Mr Clarke for securing this important debate. I, along with, I suspect, colleagues from across the constituency, have received some lobbying and information on the matter. In the South Down constituency, we are somewhat blessed to have so many forest parks. Many of them are kept in superb order and are excellent examples of what a well-run forest park should be. Over the past number of years, work has started to try to change the mindset of the Forest Service to get it to think much more about tourism, recreation, the leisure sector and the benefits that so many lifestyles derive from our great outdoor spaces, as well as about the role that the forest parks play in that. That is no less true of Castlewellan forest park, which is a gem in south Down. It is a very beautiful forest park in a very beautiful location, and the grounds are used for many events, including a large agricultural show in the summer. I think that the project that Mr Clarke talked about could build on and enhance that.

Mr Wells made remarks about the need for realism and the need to ensure that the project is well thought through. He also talked about the long-term implications and costs of not just getting the project up and running but keeping it going for years into the future for generations to continue to visit and enjoy. We need to think about that. On a positive note, I want all of us to embrace and welcome the project and to overcome the difficulties that Mr Wells quite rightly mentioned. We must do the groundwork and harness the positive comments of not only elected Members here but people in Castlewellan who are willing to roll up their sleeves and get stuck into the work that needs to be done to deliver the project. At 12 acres, the project is probably one of the largest in not only these islands but possibly Europe. It has to be restored, because it is a shame that something like it is left derelict and overgrown and is not used and enjoyed.

I encourage the Minister to listen to and respond to the debate in a positive way to see what can be done to pool the cocktail of funding that Mr Clarke talked about in his opening remarks. We must work out how all the strands can be pulled together to make this happen and to make it work into the future. That would be a real benefit not only to the South Down constituency but to all of Northern Ireland. Indeed, it would attract visitors. If we are serious across all of Northern Ireland and not just in South Down, we will see that tourism is one of the key economic drivers that could help lift our economy out of the recession in which it has been mired.

South Down, which is the gateway to the Mourne mountains, has other tourism projects. We have something to build on there to give people a reason to visit south Down, something of great historical interest that people will visit, look at and enjoy, and perhaps they will stay in accommodation there. It is about how we bring all those elements together to make that work and generate all the spin-off from extra tourist visits to Castlewellan and the south Down area. The spin-off that that has with local businesses, whether hotels, guest houses, through camping or caravanning in the forest parks, in pubs and restaurants or whatever, is good for the south Down and Northern Ireland economy.

I hope that the Minister will embrace and respond favourably to the project and show leadership in how she proposes to pull together that cocktail of funding to make things happen. Government agencies such as Forest Service have a track record of tending to approach such issues by saying that the idea is good but giving a list of reasons why it cannot happen, rather than having a positive can-do approach that I would like to see so that this project goes forward. I am very supportive, notwithstanding Mr Wells's comment that we want to make sure that we not only get it up and running but ensure that it is here for the long term, for many years and for generations that come after us to come and see the history and heritage behind this treasure in south Down, which should be enjoyed and built into our tourism strategy for south Down and Northern Ireland.

Mrs McKevitt: I am delighted to add my voice to the call for investment in the restoration of the national arboretum — I have been struggling with that word all day — in Castlewellan park. It is a shame that such a jewel in our crown has been allowed to fall into such poor condition. I welcome the fact that Mr Clarke has taken the opportunity of securing an Adjournment debate to raise this significant cause. It is important not only for south Down; it is of major national significance.

I am impressed by Mr Clarke's passionate approach to the debate, particularly when members of the Castlewellan Regeneration Ltd group, which he failed to list among the interested parties, have publicly stated their disappointment at his party's support for the project and particularly at his party's Agriculture and Rural Development Minister at the time, who failed to show any interest in the opinion of the regeneration company. That having been said, all parties and MLAs should support the call to have the restoration programme implemented.

In 1967, Forest Service in the Department of Agriculture took ownership. Although some investment was made in the early years, over recent decades the gardens and arboretum have been shamefully neglected. Promotional material informs us that, back in 1874, the Annesley family planted more than 3,000 species of trees and shrubs from around the globe in one of the finest collections of trees in Ireland. They include 42 champion trees and 20 of the oldest specimen trees in these isles. The gardens and the arboretum are great tourist attractions that bring major benefits to the area. It is not just about the quarter of a million pounds that the Forest Service earns annually but something that the whole tourism industry across south Down depends on. At a time when we are aggressively supporting tourism through our backing for major golf championships, the World Police and Fire Games, the Olympics, the MTV awards and so on —

Mr Wells: The honourable Member raised the issue of the quarter of a million pounds: if only it were so. From recent replies by the Minister of Agriculture to questions for written answer, I understand that that quarter of a million pounds was a contribution towards the management of the forest. It does not even cover the costs. If we were talking about a quarter of a million pound profit being made on the running of Castlewellan forest park every year, the argument would be clear: plough that into the running of the garden and the arboretum. My understanding is that the Forest Service makes a loss on its forests and that the entire visitor income helps only to reduce that loss rather than generate pure profit.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mrs McKevitt: I thank the Member for his intervention, and I take his point. However, the service receives that quarter of a million pounds annually.

We need to ensure that our tourism trails that have stood the test of time are not overlooked or neglected. I support the call for the restoration of Castlewellan forest park and request that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, as a matter of urgency, consults Down District Council, the Castlewellan regeneration company and the Forest Service to explore the exact needs and the most appropriate method of support.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom fáilte a chur roimh an díospóireacht seo agus ómós a thabhairt do Willie Clarke as é a thabhairt os comhair an Tí. I welcome the fact that there is cross-party support for this. It is a bit unfortunate that, in her contribution, Karen chose to play a little bit of party politics, but, notwithstanding that, it is good that all parties are supporting this important initiative.

I would like to focus on the importance of the arboretum and of supporting local initiatives and proposed partnerships that would secure the long-term future of the gardens. Although we obviously have to take finance and money into account, I do not think that we should look at it purely in terms of profit and loss. How do you measure profit? How do you measure protecting the landscape and environment for future generations? I would argue that we have to invest and not take a narrow view of how we put money into important things like Castlewellan forest park.

As has been said by all contributors, Castlewellan forest park is a major tourist attraction. It takes in well over 100,000 visitors a year. As it has not yet been mentioned in the debate, it should also be noted that Tollymore and Castlewellan rank in the top 10 parks in the North of Ireland for visitors. An té nach raibh i bPáirc Foraoise Chaisleán Uidhilín go fóill, molaim dó cuairt a thabhairt uirthi — is iontach an acmhainn í do dhaoine áitiúla agus do dhaoine ar fud na hÉireann agus thar lear. People from all over Ireland and throughout Europe have been to Castlewellan forest park. It is unfortunate that the glasshouses are in such poor condition, and that is why we call on the Minister to support the project.

I have no doubt that the Minister, being from a beautiful rural area in Ireland herself, understands the importance of preserving the park's unique character and cultural heritage. I am sure that she also understands that, in the past, it was held in the hands of one person or one family. Now it is for all the people, particularly the local people who use it daily. I have been in it in all weathers. I have walked around that beautiful lake, and it is certainly a wonderful resource.

I ask the Minister to work with the Forest Service — I have no doubt that she will — to restore the arboretum. I understand that the Department could not fund the Forest Service in relation to the specific project, but it could fund a council, a community group, an NGO or a trust. I am sure that the Department would work very well with any organisation that is formed to make sure that the project continues. The forest park is an essential part of the Castlewellan economy. When the park is busy, local businesses also benefit. Ní foláir dúinn leanstan ar aghaidh ag cur feabhais ar gach gné den Pháirc — thug Willie Clarke cuntas dúinn ar obair an phobail áitiúil agus ar obair Chomhairle an Dúin in éineacht le gníomhaireachtaí eile lena chinntiú go ndéantar í a chothabháil ar an chaighdeán is airde is féidir.

Sinn Féin has been working very hard and will continue to work very hard to try to help the local business community overcome the recession, and I feel that the proposal has the potential to attract additional trade. For tourism to reach its full potential in south Down, people need the opportunity to create new business ventures and work creatively. It is good to see the forestry and agriculture sector doing so well in the economy. Forests need to provide a balance of economic, environmental and social benefits to the people of Ireland, and those wonderful natural resources provide opportunities for additional recreation and leisure pursuits. The project would have a positive impact on general health and well-being and would have long-term, sustainable benefits for the economy of rural areas by attracting more visitors to south Down.

To conclude, I ask the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to continue to recognise the historical importance of tourism and the arboretum at Castlewellan forest park, to support the valuable work that is being done and to support the potential future work that can be done for that beautiful park.

4.00 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that, when speaking in languages other than English, they should try to give a complete translation of what they say. I listened very

carefully, and I hope that Members will attempt to do so. I will look at Hansard and, if necessary, pass on some comments. It is for the benefit of Members to understand everything that is said in the debate in the Chamber.

Ms Ruane: My apologies. If you would like me to do the translation, I can do that.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is fine. I now call the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill, to respond to the debate.

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá fáilte romhaibh. Welcome. I thank Willie Clarke for securing today's debate and all the Members who contributed to it so passionately. I am glad to have the opportunity to pick up on some of the matters that Members raised. I hope to address them all. However, I will be happy to write to Members in due course if there is anything that I do not pick up on.

I absolutely recognise Members' concerns regarding the current state of the glasshouses and garden environment at Castlewellan forest park. As Willie Clarke said, the Department bought the estate in 1967, and it was opened to the public as a forest park in 1969. I pay tribute to the many people who worked hard over many years to restore and improve the gardens in the forest. They built a caravan park, car parks, an extensive network of paths and cycle trails, fishing stands and the Peace Maze. They stabilised the level of the lake and made it accessible for water sports and replaced the mature trees with new ones. Those were all understandable priorities at that time.

The fact that there are more than 100,000 paying visitors to Castlewellan forest park each year is evidence that the park continues to be an important public asset and brings valuable business to the town. In the past, we were able to make the park available to support Down District Council with its Celtic Fusion event, and we will continue to support the annual Castlewellan show.

When I was preparing for the debate, I found that there were 20 separate instances of assets that are protected from change by legislation. We need to examine all those issues carefully, because they may be part of the problem that we need to deal with today. Undoubtedly, some will argue that the only thing that needs to be done to bring Castlewellan forest park back to good condition is to spend money. That is simply not true. If that were the case, it would have been done some time ago. The assets have a heritage value, so it is important that we appreciate the heritage value but also find a modern use. Today, the gardens need to be accessible to as many people who want to enjoy the park and the gardens as possible. That will need goodwill on all sides to seek out compromises, particularly on the balance between the historical interest and the practical matters of access. We need to renovate structures without leaving excessive bills for the future. We need to find organisational structures that provide a sustainable future; some Members picked up on that point. We need to meet the rules of any funding bodies that we can attract to the project.

Let me be very clear: notwithstanding all the issues that need to be dealt with, the Department has a policy. Michelle Gildernew brought in a policy on the social, recreational and sustainable use of our forests. This project very much fits into the principle of partnership working. In the past, the Department ran projects and maintained forests such as this through the large unemployment relief schemes. Willie Clarke mentioned this as a possible way forward for people who find themselves unemployed to learn a new skill and to volunteer their services in the forest. That is a possible way forward.

As Willie Clarke set out, partnership working will be key. We did it with district councils in the past. I also acknowledge the financial contribution that the European Commission and Down District Council made towards the Peace Maze. I welcome the financial and staffing contribution that Down District Council is making towards a network of cycle trails. I would like to do more of that with bodies outside the public sector and involve charitable bodies and commercial organisations.

In that context and notwithstanding all the issues that we need to deal with, I welcome the initiative that has been set out by Willie Clarke and look forward to hearing more about it as plans develop. I encourage the backers of the initiative and everyone involved to take careful note of the advice given to them and of the problems that have been pointed out with regard to the long-term sustainability and future funding of the project. We need to be very mindful of the needs of the bodies that may get involved, such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, the NIEA and the Forest Service. All that advice is key to moving the project forward.

There is no doubt that there is a clear need for commercial tourism benefits to flow into Castlewellan town and the wider community. As I have said, it is not just about finding the capital funds to restore some old buildings; it is also about making our forests accessible to the public and providing for the forests' sustainable use.

As to the contributions by Members, the main threads of their comments are about the tourism potential and the fact that this is a fantastic tourism attraction and we need to build on it for the future. As Caitríona Ruane said, that would have a knock-on effect for trade in the local towns. That is all stuff that we need to build on. Partnership working will be absolutely key to delivering the project, and we need to move forward with that by talking to Down District Council, the Heritage Lottery Fund and all the possible partners. Obviously, the passion of the group will be key to delivering the project and driving it forward. As I said, there is no doubt that the cocktail of funding will be key in delivering what people want — the restoration and the sustainable future of the project.

In the light of today's debate, I will instruct officials to engage with the council, the group and elected representatives for the area. I will visit the Castlewellan area. Willie Clarke has invited me to do so, and I will take him up on the invitation to come down and see it for myself. I am quite interested, now that we have had this debate and all the conversations about it. It is important that I see it at first hand, and I am happy to do that. The main thing is showcasing what is good. We have a fantastic area of natural beauty, and we should try to exploit it for tourism potential and maintain its heritage value. There is a way forward, and that is through partnership working. That is the identifiable way forward.

Adjourned at 4.07 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 23 January 2012

The Assembly met at 12.00 noon (Mr Speaker in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Durkan: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. With regard to the Speaker's ruling on a question for urgent oral answer to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety this afternoon, I wonder if the Speaker could revise that ruling and make provision for a ministerial statement on the subject instead, so that the depth and breadth of public feeling on the issue can be dealt with and, hopefully, allayed in the House.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for his point of order. I have not decided on the question for urgent oral answer yet. It might be worthwhile for the Member to take some advice from the Business Office on changing the wording of the question, if that is what he requires. Certainly, have a chat with the Business Office on the issue.

Matters of the Day

Security: Dissident Terrorism

Mr Speaker: Mr Gregory Campbell has sought leave to make a statement on dissident terror activity, including the bomb attacks in Londonderry, a matter that fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. I will call Mr Campbell to speak for up to three minutes on the subject, and I will then call Members from the other parties, as agreed with the Whips. Those Members will also have up to three minutes in which to speak on the matter. Members will know that there will be no opportunity for interventions, questions or a vote on the matter. I will not take any points of order until the item of business has been concluded. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Mr Campbell: There was a double bomb attack in Londonderry last Thursday night. Although no one was injured on that occasion, many people, particularly elderly and vulnerable people, were inconvenienced and had to leave their home for a significant time. The attack is but the latest that the police have indicated to be the work of dissident republicans. People have been targeted, property has been attacked, and police officers and soldiers have been murdered in the course of the past three years. As on other occasions, there has been total and universal condemnation of the attacks, which is good, and no one should minimise the absolute nature of that condemnation. However, total condemnation has not stopped the attacks. Indeed, as I said, we are into the third year of such attacks.

It is patently obvious that the groups behind the attacks simply do not get it. Therefore, we have to get them. Previous attempts at bombing and murder failed, and so will this one. These people do not understand that a 30-year campaign failed. Why do they think that a three-year campaign might succeed? The fact is that they do not get it and will carry on with their activities, putting lives in jeopardy and taking innocent lives.

The wider context behind this attack and others is that Northern Ireland is beginning a series of commemorations. There will be a series of commemorations and other events over the course of this decade, but the people behind this attack are determined that only the type of event that they approve of will be held. The targeting of the Visitor and Convention Bureau in Londonderry exemplifies the indication of where they are going with their attacks.

Our determination to never allow them to succeed must prevail. They will cease their activities when they are unable

to carry them out because they are in prison. They will go to prison when there is sufficient information that leads to evidence and a strong case against them in a court of law. I do not plan, Mr Speaker, to test your patience by going down the court of law route, but, unfortunately, in recent days, we have seen examples of cases where justice needs to be elaborated on.

Mr Speaker: I remind the Member of the time.

Mr Campbell: The information is out there. Dissident republicans do not operate in a vacuum; they live, move and socialise in areas where 90% of the community oppose what they are doing. Those who have information must give it to the police. It must end, and end it shall, because they will never, ever win.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. It is right, appropriate and, indeed, fitting that this Assembly sends a very clear and united message to those who carried out the bombing attacks in Derry last Thursday. The sentiment of the Assembly also reflects and echoes the sentiment of the people in Derry throughout the community. Despite seeing the anger and frustration of the people in the city last week, we also saw their absolute determination. I pay particular tribute to the emergency services on the ground, the City Centre Initiative and many community groups, all of whom ensured that, whatever the disruption, particularly for elderly people, facilities were made available throughout Friday.

The actions of those who carried out the bombings on Thursday stand in stark contrast to the actions of those who ensured that there was minimum disruption. We also saw a very clear message from across the city — from civic society, church leaders, the community and voluntary sector and the sporting and cultural organisations in the city. Those are the people who have spent the past number of years ensuring that a united voice was shown by the city at every opportunity. It is with that spirit in mind that we will go forward.

We will ensure that our city prospers, that we bring in the right amount of investment and that we bring sporting and cultural activity to the city, despite what some people tried to do last week. Our city has spoken with one voice under the direction of the One Plan. That is the message that we want to send from the Assembly and from the political representatives of the city. We speak with one voice, and we will speak with one voice as we go forward.

Mr Kinahan: The Ulster Unionist Party sends its sympathy to everyone in Londonderry. We are glad that no one was hurt, and we realise that we all must support all the businesses there and support everyone working together. We must all send a message to the dissidents that such activity must stop: there is no place for it, no place at all. I appeal to everyone in the House and in any other political establishment and to the public in general to work together to make sure that the dissidents have no room to move and that they will never win.

It is sad to see the fleadh pulling out of Londonderry and next year's City of Culture. That is especially sad after the great push last week to launch tourism in Northern Ireland.

It was with mixed pleasure that we saw the result in the Massereene case last week. It is good to see that the PSNI will carry on until everybody has been caught, but it is sad to see the noble families involved having their agony prolonged. Let us get the message across to everyone, not just all of us here, that there is no room for dissidents. We have gone a great way forward; let us keep going in that direction. There is no room for them.

Mr Eastwood: I am glad be able to stand here in condemnation of the activities of the very tiny minority of people who committed the crimes in our city last week. It is good that the whole House is sending one very clear message to those people that they will never, ever succeed and that they represent absolutely nobody in our city and in our country. This is the place in which we prove to them that democracy works. This is the place in which we prove to them that their antics and ideas are redundant and past their sell-by date.

I stood in that hotel with the elderly residents who, in their pyjamas and without their medication —one man was without his proper oxygen tank — had to be taken from their homes in a hurry last Thursday night. They are the victims of the so-called dissident republicans. They are the people who have been attacked.

I want to send a very clear message to those people. They profess to love their country but spend every day trying to destroy it. The democratic will of the people of this country is the only way by which we can achieve any of our aims. We all have a responsibility in here. The only way that we can prove to those people that violence does not work and democracy does is to provide the investment and jobs necessary to get Derry off its knees.

I want to send a clear message to the people who would stop the greatest celebration in the world of Irish culture — Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann — coming to Derry. They should realise very, very soon that that is the only way to prove to those people that they will never win. We all have a responsibility to bring about the change that is necessary in this society and in our city. First and foremost, we need to bring the fleadh to Derry.

Mr Dickson: I thank Members for the opportunity to comment on this today.

The campaign of terrorism conducted by dissidents must stop and must stop now. Others have referred to those who were put out of their homes and properties last week. It is totally reprehensible for those organisations to continue down this route. We must, at every opportunity, challenge the rationale for their behaviour. That is exactly what we are doing in the House today: challenging their rationale. There is no rationale for their behaviour. As for the people being hurt by this, the collateral damage on this occasion was, as others have said, the elderly, the vulnerable and those on medication. That is unacceptable. The only people in the city of Derry being hurt by this activity are their neighbours.

Mr Allister: All terrorism is wrong. The bombing of Londonderry at the weekend was utterly wrong. So too was the perpetual bombing of that great city by the Provisional IRA, which set the template for what has been carried on in that regard. There was no justification then, and there is no justification now. Those who seek to distinguish — to justify former terrorism while condemning present terrorism — stand themselves condemned because of the inconsistency in their position.

Some people ask why it is continuing. In part, it is continuing because those who do the present bombing look at the former bombers and conclude that it worked for them. They see a reward for terrorism. Indeed, if they look into this House at this very moment, they will see sitting on the Front Bench a lady from Londonderry convicted of conspiracy to commit explosions in coastal resorts throughout Great Britain. They see no difference between what she did and what they do. They conclude that it worked for her and her party, so why not for them? That is one of the reasons why terrorism continues.

We also discover today in Peter Hain's memoirs that there are other contributors to the success and reward of terrorism and that that included the buying off of those who hitherto said they would not bring into government convicted terrorists, buying off through financial inducements and through flattery — the oldest trick in the book.

12.15 pm

Mr Agnew: On behalf of the Green Party, I join others in condemning the attacks. For too long, the preaching of hate was accepted in this society, and violence was justified. Unfortunately, those attacks continue as a legacy of that.

We heard a lot over the weekend about the impact that the attacks will have on the view of Northern Ireland from outside and the impact they may have on tourism, especially with the City of Culture coming up and 2012: Our Time, Our Place. I want to say a little about the impact on the residents of Derry, those directly affected by having to be moved from their home, as was mentioned, the wider city and, in fact, the wider region of Northern Ireland. As Members will know, my constituency was the victim of such an attack when a bomb was planted at Palace Barracks in Holywood quite recently. I empathise with the people of Derry because that shook me out of the complacency of peace. That is a complacency where we should hope to be and one that we should hope to get our society back to because we should not have to live with this constant terror, fear of attacks and violence and, indeed, the fear of hatred that unfortunately still exists in small pockets of our society. There is an onus on us all, in this House or in the wider community, to promote peace and mutual respect wherever we go and to condemn violence and intolerance wherever we see them.

Mr McClarty: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing me in on this. Like everyone else here, I condemn those who carried out the two attacks in Londonderry last week and, indeed, subsequent attacks in Ballykelly and elsewhere. They have no future in this Province. Hopefully, the people will tell them that loud and clear, and I know they will. Unfortunately, however, we can speak here till we go blue in the face, and those who carried out those acts will not listen.

The security forces should take action to rid us of this cancer in our community. The people who were affected are ordinary, decent people. The infirm, the old and young children are the people who were affected last week and continue to be affected. In 2013, we will have the UK City of Culture. Indeed, there was the prospect of more economic activity in Londonderry with the fleadh, which is not now going to happen. Londonderry has lost out big time. Those who carried out those acts cannot succeed and will not succeed.

Executive Committee Business

Pensions Bill: First Stage

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): I beg to introduce the Pensions Bill [NIA 3/11-15], which is a Bill to make provision relating to pensions; and for connected purposes.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Committee Business

Committee Membership

Mr Speaker: As with other similar motions, this will be treated as a business motion. Therefore, there will be no debate.

Resolved:

> *That Ms Sue Ramsey replace Ms Michaela Boyle as a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety; that Ms Jennifer McCann replace Ms Sue Ramsey as a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment; that Ms Michaela Boyle replace Mr Conor Murphy as a member of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development; and that Mr Conor Murphy replace Ms Jennifer McCann as a member of the Public Accounts Committee. — [Ms J McCann.]*

Strangford Lough

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): I beg to move

> *That this Assembly recognises the environmental importance of Strangford lough and the economic contribution it makes through employment, leisure and tourism; and calls on the Executive to introduce, as a matter of urgency, measures to protect and restore its modiolus habitat in a way that meets the requirements of the EU habitats directive (92/43/EEC); and further calls on the Executive, when implementing such measures, to ensure that people who derive an income from the lough are not economically disadvantaged.*

Mr Speaker, I wish you and all Members a happy Chinese new year: Kung Hay Fat Choy. I wish people to note that I am working today, even though it is a public holiday back home.

On behalf of the Committee for the Environment, I am delighted to open the debate. I welcome the chance to speak on this important issue. Problems in Strangford lough are not new; they have been accumulating over the years. That is why the Committee saw the need to table the motion. It is time to resolve the problems to the satisfaction of Europe and those who use the lough.

The beauty and uniqueness of Strangford lough is well recognised locally, at European level and internationally. It is an area of outstanding beauty, an area of special scientific interest (ASSI), a special protection area under the birds directive and a special area of conservation under the habitats directive. In addition, it is internationally recognised as a Ramsar site. Biogenic or living reefs formed by generations of modiolus — horse mussels — are one of the main reasons why the lough is considered to have such a unique habitat. The Committee believes that we have a duty to protect the characteristics that make it so special. However, as we all know, people earn a living from the lough, and we have a duty to safeguard their future.

As a result of a complaint to Europe about the way in which the lough was being managed back in 2003, the Commission started infraction proceedings. In response, trawl fishing was banned. By 2008, a £1 million restoration plan was in place, and the Commission closed the infraction case. However, a recent report concluded that the decline of horse mussels had not been halted by the management intervention and that modiolus reefs remain much reduced in extent, density and condition. That strongly suggests that not enough has been done to protect that precious site. It also raises questions about the value for money of the restoration programme. When the Minister replies to our motion today, perhaps he will let us know exactly how much was spent on the restoration programme and why it did not deliver.

The Environment Committee recently considered a response from the independent chairperson of the group that was established to oversee the implementation of the restoration programme. He told the Committee that he was frustrated because a main part of the plan was not implemented, namely to introduce total protection for the remaining modiolus biogenic reef sites within one year of the adoption of the plan and for damaged reefs to be identified and protected from further damage. He went on to say that any new restoration plan should introduce more extensive no-take zones, where modiolus reefs would be fully protected, as soon as possible. However, what the Committee found most surprising was that the chairperson of the group had never been asked for his opinion by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) or the Department of the Environment (DOE) before they halted the restoration plan in 2011.

I believe that we all recognise the key problem in the case. Although DOE is the competent authority for protecting the lough, it cannot compel another Department to carry out what it believes needs to be done. DARD's aim is to assist the competitive development of the fishing sector of Northern Ireland's economy. Understandably, it is wary of measures that will impact on that role. Each Department is working towards its own goals. However, in this instance, lack of a joined-up approach puts Northern Ireland at risk of incurring major fines — fines that could quickly outweigh the cost of the restoration programme and the lough's fishing value put together. Therefore, a way must be found in our governance system to get the balance right and address the problem quickly.

(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Molloy] in the Chair)

The Committee is not naive in thinking that addressing the issue will not impact on those who fish the lough. It fully recognises that exclusion zones would have an impact. However, if managed properly, they would allow restoration of the lough. Evidence from other UK regions where no-take zones have been established suggests that fishing improves in surrounding areas as fish spill over from protected areas. As the motion recognises, the Committee certainly does not want to destroy people's livelihoods. However, if the lough is not restored, its fishermen will have nothing to catch.

Certain things can and should be done to restore Strangford lough to ensure that it meets its potential for leisure and tourism and to ensure a future for its fishermen. The challenge now, as it has been for many years, is for Departments to work in a co-ordinated manner for the benefit of the lough and all who use it. What is needed is a viable restoration plan that will be implemented in full and constant monitoring to ensure that it is working. That will inevitably cost money, but, when the cost of restoration is compared with infraction fines, it is clear what must be done.

I will now speak as an MLA and not as Chairperson of the Committee. Strangford lough is an area of such significance and importance that its protection must be a primary focus. In November 2011, the Ulster Wildlife Trust made a second complaint to the European Commission on the basis that, six years after formulation of the restoration plan, it was clear to the trust that little, if any, action had been taken by DARD to implement the terms of the plan. The trust stated that it believes that there has been a systemic and deliberate failure to honour the commitments set out in the restoration plan that has seriously compromised the protection of the modiolus reefs in Strangford lough and undermined wider compliance with the habitats directive in Northern Ireland.

It is imperative that DARD and DOE work together to continue the project to fruition. We need to achieve all the plan's short-, medium- and long-term objectives in order to provide full protection for the remaining and damaged biogenic reefs. We must stop pussyfooting around with half-hearted measures.

Two small fisheries exclusion zones introduced last March, five years behind schedule, are clearly inadequate. Furthermore, the European Commission will not be satisfied. It will be constantly on our backs, and we will be living in the shadow of the threat of infraction proceedings.

12.30 pm

If we require more restrictions on the fishing industry, we need to look at feasible measures to compensate those who will be affected in the short term. Compensation to this relatively small industry based in the lough would pale in significance to the fines the EU will impose, making it a much more economically viable option. The short-term pain would ultimately benefit fishing, tourism and the ecosystem of the area.

Strangford lough is a national asset, and restoring its rich, wide life is vital to the continued ability of the lough to —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Ms Lo: No, I am sorry; I am coming to the end.

Restoring its rich, wide life is vital to the continued ability of the lough to keep its international designations and sustain local industries. I look forward to the rest of the debate.

Miss M McIlveen: I support the motion and do so from the perspective of a representative of Strangford constituency. In that context, five minutes is probably not long enough to speak about my own area. However, I hope that, in that time, I can give a balanced view to the debate. At this stage, I thank the Committee for the Environment for tabling the motion and the Chair for her comments.

Strangford lough boasts some of the most breathtaking views in Northern Ireland and has a unique ecosystem, and I am not just a little bit biased in respect of that. However, in a tourism context, it is probably as underused as it could be, but it is still a valuable asset, generating hundreds of jobs and producing an important income for the area.

The lough is home to over 2,000 marine and plant species, and, given the importance of the area, as the Chair said, it has been designated as a special conservation area, a special protection area, a Ramsar site, an area of special scientific interest and a marine nature reserve. It is one of the most important breeding sites on the entire island for common seals and some grey seals.

The lough offers wonderful vantage points from which to view a wide range of birds, such as terns, herons, redshank, curlew and, of course, brent geese, which flock in their thousands to the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust site at Castle Espie during the autumn. The area is also renowned for its walking and riding trails, which some Members in this Chamber should take advantage of.

As an Assembly, we should not underestimate the value of horse mussel beds, which are the subject of this motion. While they are not commercially fished themselves, the modiolus reefs provide nursery beds for other species. It is recognised by environmentalists that damage to those reefs also impacts on the delivery of ecosystem services, where the mussels act as a powerful natural water filtration system, which is vital to the livelihoods of local people through tourism, recreation and fisheries.

The lough has a rich history of fishing and boasts a wide range of species, including prawns, scallops, cockles, oysters, herring, flounder, mussels and mackerel. However, today, the focus of the fishermen is on velvet crab, brown crab, European lobster, Dublin Bay prawns and buckie whelks. The pots used in the lough are light prawn creels. Around 23 vessels fish pots in Strangford lough. Six of those are full-time, and the value, at point of first sale, of the pot fishery is estimated at around £140,000.

I understand that the fishermen have sought to work closely with DARD to ensure that a sustainable fishery remains and that commercial species are enhanced. That work has included the drawing up of a voluntary code of practice for fishing static gear in Strangford lough, a proposed Strangford lough pot fishing management plan and an agreement with DARD on the sea fisheries exclusion zones, which were introduced in March 2011 to protect horse mussels and are in addition to the closed areas specified in December 2001. However, there is a view that that is perhaps too little, too late.

The fishermen would say that extending the total protection zone and maintaining the ban on the use of mobile fishing gear, as recommended by Queen's University's modiolus restoration research project, would spell the end for their industry. Although, at first view, the value of the catch does not seem high, we should underestimate neither the value of the industry to those involved in it nor families in the area's reliance on such fishing.

The motion was tabled in the context of the recent report by the Ulster Wildlife Trust on the Executive's failure, under the EU habitats directive, to restore the habitat in Strangford lough. I am also aware that the Ulster Angling Federation made a complaint against the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) about salmon nets under the same directive. One of the major concerns that I have, and that the Assembly faces in its ability to deliver services to the wider population, is the prospect of another huge EU fine. That could be millions of euros that would come directly from our grant and inevitably impact on the delivery of services in education, health and so on. Such a sanction must be avoided, and finding the Department that is to blame for the current situation is secondary to finding a resolution.

The Executive need to take action on both those matters.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Miss M McIlveen: In particular, DARD and DOE need to work with a common purpose to ensure that the environment in which the horse mussels can thrive is maintained and that those who derive an income from the lough are not deprived of their livelihood. Thank you.

Mr W Clarke: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I serve on the Committee for the Environment and the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development. Therefore, I can see both the purely environmental view and

the views of those who are trying to make a living from the lough's assets, whether through fishing or tourism.

Everyone wants to protect Strangford lough. The Member who spoke previously outlined the environmental and scenic qualities of the lough. It also has massive potential for the Strangford constituency and my constituency of South Down. Everyone wants to see the lough fished in a sustainable manner. I met representatives from the fishing sector on Friday, and they put their views to me. They feel that they have been mistreated at times, particularly in 2003 when a ban was imposed on mobile gear fishing — mainly dredging and trawling. Indeed, I corresponded with the direct rule Minister at the time, Angela Smith, about that ban. By their nature, trawling and dredging will have an impact on the seabed. However, pot fishing is a different and more sustainable type of fishing, and one that the fishing sector was encouraged to become involved in by the Department of the Environment and the fisheries section of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. The fishing community has tried its best to impose a voluntary code of practice on the sustainability measures put in place. That includes minimum size catches and the creation of its own no-fish and throw-back zones.

The fishing community has suffered great financial losses. No compensation was offered at the time of the ban on mobile fishing gear. That matter has yet to be resolved, and there is a bit of anger in the fishing community. However, the community also takes a pragmatic view and acknowledges that the horse mussel reefs have to be protected, and urgently. The two Departments have done work together to look at an extension of no-fish zones in Strangford lough. Although it is not happy with the proposition, the fishing community realises that it has to bring something new to the European Commission tomorrow, when the matter will be discussed.

The fishing community also wants to know why the horse mussels are dying. It does not feel that pot fisheries are having a damaging impact on horse mussels; rather, it feels that pollution is to blame and that there should be a greater emphasis placed on outflow pipes in and around the lough.

They also believe that climate change, a factor which was mentioned in the university's report, may have an impact on all species in the lough. That has not been looked at genuinely. We need to take temperature readings in the lough, and we need to look in more detail at the different species and predators found there. It is my understanding that starfish, which are in abundance in the lough, are one of the main predators of the mussels.

Mr Wells: The evidence shows that starfish move in after an area has been denuded of its horse mussel community. It would be wrong to blame starfish, because in those areas in which horse mussels have survived, there is no issue with starfish. Dredging has to take the main blame for what has happened.

Mr W Clarke: I have no difficulty in conceding that dredging has an impact on the habitats and on wildlife on the seabed. However, commercial mussel fisheries in Carlingford bring in pot fisheries for their expertise and subsidise them to fish for predators in and around their commercial fisheries. It is obvious that there is a way to approach the matter.

It is OK for people to talk about closing fisheries and say that the impact will be small, but the impact will be big if you have a mortgage or a bank loan to pay, or you have to pay your crew. We are already facing pressure from European fisheries, which is killing our fishing industry. Where we have the opportunity to have proper management structures in place, particularly for pot fisheries, we need to take it.

We need to manage our fisheries in a sustainable manner. I believe that the fishing community is crying out to be part of that project; it is saying that it wants to be involved when the DOE is carrying out tests. The community is never asked to take part in collecting data.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member must bring his remarks to a close.

Mr W Clarke: People could be paid a few pounds to collect data, and the DOE must look at that.

Mr Kinahan: As the Committee for the Environment knows, I am very keen to speak on this matter, and, particularly, to have the motion put forward in the Assembly, as I felt that the Committee never had enough time to explore all the different avenues, whether those be protecting the environment or looking after the fishing rights. We have to find our way through the middle of that, whether it is about protecting the lough bed or the fishermens' living. Our job as politicians is to get an answer to that quickly. It should be easier, I believe, than the manner in which we are doing it. At times, it is a story of bad leadership and dithering, despite well-intentioned people in many areas. We have to find some way of making that happen.

We have all been brought up to believe that fish is good for us. We all want to see the fishing industry expand and do better in the future. Today, as some will know, we are also looking at stopping salmon netting; not to stop salmon being netted, but to protect it so that it is there for us and for fishermen in the future.

Those of my age and older grew up through the cod wars and battles in Europe over fishing. We know that, underlying everything, we have to find a balanced way to go forward. It is hard for a man from County Antrim to praise County Down, but Strangford lough is a fantastic place and is significant to the world. I always enjoy a good rapport in debates involving Down versus Antrim. I live in a great county, but in Strangford lough we have a very special feature; a world feature. It is a Ramsar-designated wetland; it is a marine nature reserve; it is an area of specific scientific interest; we could go on. It is very special, and we have to find a way forward.

12.45 pm

We have heard from everyone in the debate that horse mussels, or modiolus modiolus, are vital to the lough bed and to the fish of the future, and we have to find our way forward. One million pounds has been spent, yet all we have are two small protection areas, a failing — so we are told — modiolus bed and a possible exclusion box, which is yet to be agreed. Worst of all, we are faced with a very possible large infraction fine. We have to find some way forward and be able to decide, whether or not the problem is caused by global warming, what we will do. We have to be able to decide whether it is pollution and what we are doing about that. We have to find our balance with nature.

There are only 23 different fishing groups and a turnover of £140,000, so it may seem small, but we have to find a way forward that allows both to exist. We cannot duck the issue. We need both Departments to set up and work together in a dynamic fashion so that we resolve the issue. Tomorrow, we may know whether what we are doing is enough, but we should be much more dynamic and ready to work immediately the moment that they have finished. We should be working with the fishermen and all of the stakeholders in Strangford lough and finding that way forward.

We have to get away from that wishy-washy world that we sometimes get into in this Building of no timelines and no dynamism. We have to sit down, get all of the facts quickly and find the way forward. I am sure that those fishermen are keen to help us, whether they fish outside the box when it is agreed or whether it is made smaller. They will be keen to help, whether that is in having a role in mending and helping to mend the lough bed or even in working with us in the inshore fishing around the outside. There is a huge future there; £140,000 a year seems a small sum, and we should be spending more, protecting the lough and finding the right way forward. That should be done with all of us working together with a time frame and trying to get it resolved in a time period such as six months to make it a success for everyone.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Chairperson of the Environment Committee for tabling the motion on such a special day. I wish her and the Chinese community every happiness at the beginning of the year of the dragon.

Reconciling the needs of the environment and the rights of those who are making a living out of the fruits of the sea has never been an easy task, and I suspect that it gets no easier. However, given the horrendous damage that has been done to the environment in modern times, the need to protect the environment — in this case, Strangford lough — finds acceptance with most people, particularly the fishermen who make their living from the lough.

The history of complaints has been well charted by the Ulster Wildlife Trust, whose members are conscious of the need to protect the modiolus reefs. Their continuing interest in driving home the need to implement EU habitats directive 92/43/EEC is highly commendable. Other organisations have been directly involved in the work that has been necessary to better understand the issues surrounding the modiolus reefs, particularly the Strangford lough modiolus restoration committee, which was chaired by Professor Raymond Seed when he was a lecturer in marine biology at Queen's University. He cites as the main frustration the failure to implement the major criteria in the original plan. His explanation for that failure relates to my remarks at the beginning of my contribution to the debate; the need to reconcile the care of the environment with the rights of those who make a living from the fruits of the sea. Quite frankly, we should have moved on from that debate if the professor's assessment is true. The time for juggling and playing politics with the ecology of Strangford lough is well and truly over.

The motion asks the Assembly to recognise the environmental importance of Strangford lough and the economic contribution it makes through employment, leisure and tourism. Doing that in a way that does not disadvantage the economic prosperity of those whose living is made from fishing the lough is the Houdini trick that many do not believe is achievable. Postponing decisions is certainly not an answer. That only postpones the day and, in the meantime, may result in the reefs being permanently damaged beyond redemption. Modiolus reefs must be fully protected, as advocated in the initial restoration plan that was submitted to the European Commission and recommended by Strangford lough's modiolus restoration committee.

In my opinion, the failure to continue to fund and to implement the Strangford lough modiolus biogenetic reef restoration plan was an error of judgement on the part of the Department of Agriculture. The map work should not be five years behind, and there are other aspects of this matter, which, I am sure, will be covered in the debate; indeed, some already have been.

At the end of the day, all of us want the same thing for the environment, and that is a better understanding of the importance of investing in and protecting life in all its forms in Strangford lough and elsewhere. We can do that, but the need to do so must be voiced by the Assembly. It should not be done under the threat of infraction proceedings from the European Commission. It should be brought about as the result of a genuine desire to protect, for future generations, that which has been passed on by a previous generation that, dare I say it, may have better understood the need to protect rather than destroy and create rather than kill off. Always remember that there is a much higher price to pay for destroying the environment than can possibly be derived from exploiting it.

Mr Frew: The Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development has an obvious interest in the motion. With that Committee's agreement, I met the Chairperson of the Environment Committee on 12 December to discuss matters of mutual concern, including enabling legislation for national parks and the Ulster Wildlife Trust's letter of complaint to the European Commission about the management of Strangford lough as a special area of conservation, on which we agreed that both Committees would work together. Therefore, it was a bit of a surprise to find the motion on the Order Paper. Nonetheless, it is here, we are debating it and it is good that we have the debate at this time.

Although I do not speak for the Agriculture Minister, I know that her reply to the Committee stated her disappointment at the timing of the complaint to the Commission from the trust. However, the trust felt that it had no other place to take its complaint. I explained to the Chair of the Environment Committee that, having seen the terms of the complaint, the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee immediately wrote to ask the Minister to comment on the issues raised by the trust. I provided Ms Lo with a copy of the Minister's reply.

The Agriculture Committee was concerned by the complaint but found the Minister's reply somewhat reassuring. We were told that the Department had invested £1 million in the ongoing restoration research project. The Department's research had indicated that pot fishing had little effect on the horse mussel reefs. Regardless of that, the Department introduced two non-fishing zones in March 2011. Members should also remember that mobile fishing gear, used for

such as trawling and dredging, was banned around 1993. A total ban on the use of mobile gear in the lough was imposed in 2003.

The trust sees that as being inadequate. However, the fishermen take a different view, and we should not forget the wider tourism and leisure interest in the lough and the need to up our game in that regard. The Agriculture Committee sees that a balance needs to be struck, and it has no problem with the spirit of the motion. Everyone needs to act responsibly. Protecting a natural asset, such as Strangford lough, is in the interest of us all and of future generations. We want, and need to see, a win-win solution.

I am sure that, if he speaks in the debate, Mr McCarthy, in particular, as a member of the Agriculture Committee, will stress the importance of fishing responsibly, in a way that respects the environment and is sustainable. That is a view that he has articulated in Committee, and it is shared by members of the Committee.

The Committee understands that DARD officials continue to work closely with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. We are led to believe that proposals are well developed and the respective Ministers are due to consider a draft revised restoration programme. Maybe, in responding, Minister Attwood will confirm that and give an indication as to when he and Minister O'Neill expect to agree the terms of the draft and when it will be referred to the Commission. It must strike a balance for the good of the lough and all of the livelihoods that it supports.

There must be a full investigation into the problems of the reduced horse mussel reefs. The fishermen would tell you that they are not to blame for that condition. Indeed, it could well be down to global warming and pollution, not fishing. It would be a shame if there was a ruination of livelihoods, only to realise, in a couple of years or 20 years, that the problem was not fishing after all. It is vitally important that there be a full investigation of all the facts and figures to see exactly where it all lies. If it is partly down to fishing, we should accept that and put a plan in place to take it forward in that way. If the Minister is able to provide evidence that action is being taken, I am sure that it will reassure the Assembly in that regard. If there is a lesson here, it is that we in the Assembly must see —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Frew: — our Departments and Ministers working together much more closely on issues like this one.

Mr Bell: I should clarify that I am making my remarks as an MLA for Strangford and not as a junior Minister in the Northern Ireland Executive. I also declare a family membership of the National Trust. I join Anna Lo in wishing the Chinese community every success for the new year. As Anna knows, I have an academic relationship with Xinjiang University, so, for all those who are listening on the internet from there, we wish our oldest ethnic community every success and happiness in the incoming year — the year of the dragon.

When we speak of Strangford lough, we need to be careful, because you are into an area where angels fear to tread. It is an area of iconic natural beauty. It is also an area where many livelihoods which have been affected by the damage to the fishing industry in the last number of years have had to swim against the tide — if I can use the analogy — to survive.

There are three things that we need to do. It is about the sustainability of Strangford, which we are all agreed on. It is about protecting the biodiversity of Strangford lough, which is one of the most biodiverse regions in Europe. That is not hyperbole. It is one of the icons of biodiversity. Thirdly, this has to be a debate about balance — balancing the needs of the recreation industry, the tourism industry and the fishing industry against the environmental needs of the lough. If we can get a win-win situation that recognises the need to protect the modiolus — the horse mussels, which we agree we need to protect — but that does not unnecessarily damage the other interests and livelihoods there, we will have protected the jewel in the crown of Northern Ireland, which is Strangford lough.

In the December fisheries negotiations, we all kept a careful eye on what was going to happen. As was said, Strangford lough is predominantly a pot fishery. The main target species are the nephrops, the velvet crab, the brown crab and the lobster. With the exception of the nephrops, which were kept to the 2011 quota, everything else was allowed to go ahead, so it was quite a successful negotiation.

When we speak of one of the most diverse marine ecosystems in Europe, and of mussels that can range from 35 mm to 200 mm, one simple statistic conveys the need for the debate today. One mussel will filter about one litre of water every hour, and 1,000 mussels can filter 24 tonnes of water every day. That, if anything, underlines the need for protection of the species.

1.00 pm

I would like to thank Minister Attwood, who met me privately as a Strangford MLA. I appreciate that we come from different parties and argue on most things. However, there is a level of agreement on this issue, and I appreciate his hard work and interest in the area. The agreement is that we balance protection against the needs of fisheries and recreational and tourism interests.

The year 2012 will be a massive year for Northern Ireland. It is absolutely pregnant with potential. I, as a Strangford MLA, want to draw down the tourism benefit that we will get from visitors going to the lough. If you travel down the lough, particularly as the sun is rising or setting, you will see a myriad of colours, and you will be in one of the most beautiful areas in the world. However, I underline to the Minister the need to seek a balanced approach between the competing interests.

Mr Allister: Speaking of balance, does the Member agree that it would tilt the balance in the wrong direction if, in addition to the trawl ban, we heed the preposterous suggestion that there should be a ban on creel fishing, given that it is one of the most environmentally friendly types of fishing that you can undertake and that AFBI has reported that there is no indication of adverse impact from creel or pot fishing? Does the Member agree that, whatever else the Ulster Wildlife Trust might have done right, it has got it sadly wrong in demanding an end to pot fishing in Strangford lough?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Bell: I strongly concur with the import of what you say and, equally, with what the Chairman of the Agriculture Committee said. There are other reasons too. It is important that we do not throw out the baby with the bathwater. The fishermen and community in Strangford who I speak to are very much in favour of sustainability and protection of the ecosystem. It is in the interests of their livelihood to ensure that this natural species is there to filter the water. We need to balance that against global warming and pollution and certainly not to punish the fishing industry —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Draw your remarks to a close.

Mr Bell: — unless there is evidence. There will be fierce objections from many on these Benches if that happens. We need a win-win situation, and I believe that it is achievable.

Mr Nesbitt: I support the motion and speak as another Member of the Legislative Assembly for Strangford. I believe, from memory, that some 11 of us put ourselves forward to be elected to the House for Strangford last May. The range of political views was quite a stretch, from the United Kingdom Independence Party at one end to Sinn Féin at the other, which is a fairly decent definition of a political spectrum. Yet I imagine that one issue on which we could all have agreed is that we want the best for Strangford lough.

The trick is to define what we mean by the best. The Assembly and its Executive say that we put the economy at the heart of everything that we do. If that is so, let nobody belittle the fact that the fishermen who earn a living from the lough do so at great cost to themselves. I do not want to hear anybody tell the House that the value of the fish caught in Strangford lough is only £140,000, nor do I wish to hear, as others have reported, MLAs whispering elsewhere that we are talking about only a couple of dozen vessels and a few people. That £140,000 is very hard-earned money; they may think that it is much harder earned than the salary of a politician.

If we are putting the economy at the heart of all we do, we must support the fishing fleet in Strangford lough, no matter how small that fleet may be. However, to truly support it, we must also protect it from damaging its own future and ensure sustainability, as we have already done. Putting the economy first means that we must recognise the lough's potential for tourism, sailors, cruiser yachtsmen, windsurfers, divers, staycationers and all the rest.

We must also be constant and tireless in monitoring how these activities impact on the lough, on its fish stock and on the marine environment that sustains that stock. If we find evidence that the fishing fleet or anyone else is damaging the long-term viability or sustainability of the lough, we must act as we have acted before. However, the question is whether this is the right time to act. If we have the evidence base that says that something or someone is damaging the lough, then, yes, it is time, but do we have that evidence?

Queen's University was paid a significant sum of money to produce a research paper on modiolus modiolus and the threat to the horse mussel reefs. I did not read definitive evidence that any current legal human activity is a threat to modiolus modiolus. In fact, given that the horse mussel thrives by filtering water through its system, as my colleague the Member for Strangford pointed out, I believe that the absolute extremes of scientific theory may suggest that the mussel has suffered because we no longer pump raw sewage into the lough. You may see mussels on the menu in the restaurant today, but, if those are modiolus modiolus, I suggest you choose the vegetarian option.

The Ulster Wildlife Trust has taken a very serious step in referring this matter to Europe. I spoke with their representatives last week about this, and I am convinced that they believe they had no choice. That is because they believe that two devolved Departments have consistently failed to work in harmony to fix the problem. If the Ulster Wildlife Trust is wrong and we end up paying what they agree could be tens of millions of pounds in infraction fines, I hope they will come with me to Newtownards at the head of the lough and down the peninsula where they can explain to the unemployed why the money that could have created jobs has been denied them. However, if they are right and the fault lies with the Department of Environment and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, then shame on those Departments. Let their senior civil servants visit Strangford to explain why the money we could have spent on roads, schools and social housing is being bundled up to be sent back to Europe. Our agriculture and fisheries Minister visits Brussels every December to argue against further cuts in quotas for our fleets in the Irish Sea. The argument is always based on contestable, if not straight dodgy, scientific evidence.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Nesbitt: Let not inconclusive scientific evidence or a lack of joined-up government be our downfall in this matter; rather, let us demonstrate today to all those with an interest in the lough our capacity for joined-up, common-sense government.

Ms Ritchie: In supporting the motion today, we must adopt a balanced approach to the management, care and future of Strangford lough. I represent South Down, which is at the southern tip of Strangford lough. My constituency is between two loughs: Strangford lough and Carlingford lough. It is important that this balanced approach reflects protection for those from all of the communities along the lough who derive their income from it.

Today we have a Minister who, when faced with infraction proceedings, has been probably the first Minister to seek to protect and restore this important marine habitat of horse mussels. That must be recognised because this issue has probably been lying around the Department for many years. Minister Attwood has been the first person to grab it, deal with it and have a concern for the local marine environment and the unique ecosystem that is Strangford lough.

There is irrefutable evidence that Strangford lough is an area of outstanding natural beauty. Its unique environment, combined with the diversity and abundance of wildlife, have also led to its being a protected conservation site. It has an EU designation as a special area of conservation. However, we must not forget that the lough is used daily by local communities.

The ferry service is essential to communities in the Strangford and South Down constituencies because the ferry is the same as a road system. It prevents two constituencies from being divorced and cut off from one another in the local economy. The lough is also important to tourists, those involved in recreational activity and those involved in the sustainable pot fishery.

The habitats directive forms the cornerstone of Europe's nature conservation policy, and it is built around two pillars: the network of protected sites and the strict system of species protection. The existence of the horse mussel in Strangford lough has contributed to the lough's protected status. Having talked to the Minister about this issue, I understand that the horse mussel is important to the future generation and, perhaps, procreation of fish. Therefore, those involved in pot fishery need to reflect on that issue.

We also need to reflect that many who live on the lough shore derive an income from it. Various reports, one from Queen's University, found a continuing decline in that vital habitat and recommended immediate action for total protection of the remaining reefs. Imagine what the Great Barrier Reef is like and think of this as similar but on a smaller scale. There is an abiding and compelling need to protect it. However, we must also take it on board that the report does not show pot fishing to have had any negative impact on the modiolus reef beds. There is also a report by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, from which the fishing industry derives a lot of its scientific information, that provides considerable evidence that pot fishing does not harm those important biogenic reefs.

It is important that the views of the fishermen are also reflected. They feel, notwithstanding the issues raised by Members who have spoken previously, that they are making all possible efforts to ensure that there is a sustainable fishery and the lough is properly protected. For hundreds of years, fishermen have worked the lough, fishing for a range of species. However, we need to ensure that, in all of this, we have a truly sustainable future for the lough, its environment and the diverse wildlife on which sustainable fisheries rely.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Ms Ritchie: I have no doubt that the Minister will demonstrate in his response how it is possible to protect the lough with the communities, Ards and Down district councils and wider government working together with those involved in recreation, tourism and the pot fishery to ensure the protection of the horse mussels and people's incomes.

Mr Wells: Strangford lough is often described as a body of water entirely surrounded by committees. That is part of the problem. I speak as someone who was a member of the Ulster Wildlife Trust's ruling council for four years in the 1980s and worked for the National Trust for 10 years. Both organisations are obviously extremely interested in this subject.

What we allowed to happen to the horse mussel community in Strangford lough is an absolute tragedy. We allowed that unique ecosystem to be destroyed, and, in large parts of the lough, it was effectively wiped out. We cannot lecture the Governments of Brazil, Congo and other countries about cutting down the rainforest when we, a so-called civilised western democracy, had not the political will to save one of our own unique habitats. To a large extent, it was destroyed.

1.15 pm

I understand that, from a fisheries point of view, there is a community living off Strangford lough, and it is important to recognise that. However, equally, as far as farming is concerned, we as a society have decided, under the common agricultural policy, to proscribe a list of farming operations, so that farmers cannot do them. We say that we will restrict the removal of hedgerows, the drainage of wetlands and the grubbing up of woodlands. In return, we pay, quite rightly in my opinion, the farming community a significant subsidy of around £300 million a year. That has been good for the farming community and good for the environment, and I hope that, under the common fisheries policy, we will be able to negotiate an equally favourable deal. I do not see why it is not possible to say to the fishing community that certain aspects of what it does may endanger what is left of the horse mussel community and that, in return for its co-operation, we will pay it sufficient compensation so that it is not out of pocket as a result of that decision. Already, the management of sensitive sites (MOSS) agreements under the Northern Ireland Environment Agency compensate farmers for further restrictions to protect wildlife and landscapes. I do not see why the same principle should not apply to fishermen.

The Ulster Wildlife Trust has been driven to act. It feels that the situation has become so bad that it has to go back to Europe to ask for further infraction proceedings. If that happens, we will end up paying far more money out of the taxpayers' pot than if we adequately compensate the fishing industry in Strangford. We are not crying wolf any more, because we have seen through the single farm payments that, when Europe starts imposing fines, it means business. We have only to look at what happened under the single farm payment regime to see what happens when Europe really gets its teeth into taking action. Therefore, I feel that we have to act now.

I do not see extending the exclusion zones as negative. All the evidence from places such as Lundy off Devon and Ramsey on the Isle of Man shows that large exclusion zones in which no fishing is allowed act as breeding grounds for fish species that can be caught in the rest of the body of water, which, in this case, would be Strangford lough. There are indications of huge increases in, for example, lobsters and scallops when fishing in certain areas is banned. Ultimately, it is to the benefit rather than the detriment of the fishing community.

Throughout the debate, Members have talked about balance. The balance should be in favour of the ecosystem on which the fishing industry is dependent. We have to take some brave decisions. The current exclusion zones, which were enacted in March 2011, are totally inadequate for the protection of the horse mussel community. The recommendation is that those be extended quite dramatically. That would still leave areas of the lough that could be fished and the necessary viable area set aside for the protection of that unique habitat.

I lay the blame for the situation purely at the feet of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. It did not work closely with DOE to bring about a coherent policy to stop us getting to this point. I believe that there was a will in DOE to deal with the issue. The problem was that it had to work with DARD, which dragged its heels for years, resulting in the mess that we are in now. Either we take a decision now to bring about the orderly protection of modiolus or have something thrust upon us from Europe that could be particularly nasty. Therefore, we have to act and act immediately.

Mr Weir: As a son of County Down and one who was born and has lived all his life on the Ards peninsula, albeit at the top end, and as I am sandwiched between two other sons of County Down, I acknowledge — in slightly less begrudging terms than Mr Kinahan did — the valuable ecosystem and beauty of Strangford lough and, indeed, the need to preserve it. Undoubtedly, the mussel beds are not only beneficial in themselves but act as a means to an end. Their first identification in the Strangford lough area was midway through the 19th century, which predates even Kieran McCarthy's involvement — by at least a few years.

At this late stage in the debate, much has already been said. As my colleague Mr Wells was pointing the finger strongly at DARD and exonerating DOE, I wondered whether the Minister might be working that into his speech. Members have talked about whether the Ulster Wildlife Trust was fully justified and thought that it had no other course of action to take or whether there is some resentment at its taking the issue to Europe. Some of us have concerns, in a wider context, about Europe having an over-reaching role. In many ways, however, those questions are irrelevant, because we are where we are.

Unless further action is taken, we will undoubtedly face infraction proceedings. As indicated by Mr Nesbitt and others, the impact on the wider economy of money being diverted from necessary services towards infraction proceedings is something that we need to face up to. It is also the case that, had various things been done many years ago, we would not be in the position that we are in. However, there is a need for action.

The key word in this debate seems to be "balance". Some Members may have a slightly different view about where the balance is to be struck; I suspect that Mr Wells is at one end of the scale and there may be others at the opposite end of the scale.

Mr Wells: Mr Allister.

Mr Weir: I am not naming any names.

There are two key aspects to striking a balance. First, as has been said, there is willingness by the fishing community to embrace change and to go further than it did before, but that has to be reasonable and proportionate. Indeed, there needs to be some expansion of the protected zones here. Others in the House have greater knowledge of exactly what type of fishing can and cannot happen; I feel that I am in no position to judge that. However, I believe that, if government agencies work closely with the fishing community, there can be an agreement that everybody can buy into. It is a matter of striking that balance.

Having spoken to the Ulster Wildlife Trust, I know that they have little doubt about where they apportion the blame on the issue. It is an issue on which we need to see a joined-up approach between the DOE and DARD, and we need to sing from the same hymn sheet, certainly from tomorrow onwards, when we meet the European Union. The NGOs that I have spoken to believe that the DOE has made a strenuous effort and has, indeed, taken action; however, there is a feeling that that has not been matched by DARD. Therefore, it is important that we have a balanced, practical and reasonable approach, one that guarantees the proper implementation of a plan. The principal criticism of where we are is that good plans were drawn up but were not fully implemented.

The Minister is fond of saying that he wants to ensure that he is in power, not just in government; it is one of his regular catchphrases. To some extent, the problem that the DOE has had with the issue is that it has been in government but has not had the full power. It has been carrying the responsibility for the issue but without the opportunity to fully implement actions on it. I look forward to the Minister's comment on it, but I think that one of the key tests of the Assembly is the extent to which we are able to harness DOE, DARD and, on some other related issues, DCAL to produce a positive way forward that the fishermen can buy into and that can help to provide environmental protection and enable us to stave off what would be very damaging infraction proceedings. They would damage the reputation of Northern Ireland, its environment and its economy. I am happy to support the motion. I look forward to actions that have to be taken in the days ahead.

Mr McCarthy: I want to say at the outset that fishermen are willing, able and waiting to discuss this matter with the Department — or Departments, I should say. They have come up with something. There is no one in this Building today more passionate about Strangford lough and its environs than me: and why not? My front door is less than 60 ft from the lough's edge, so I live, sleep, eat, smell and do everything in relation to Strangford lough, and I want to see Strangford lough and its environs protected. As other Members said, it is Northern Ireland's prize possession and most certainly has to be protected and enhanced. I pay tribute to the organisations and groups, including the users, who continue to promote and preserve everything that is good within and around that truly wonderful location.

The motion speaks of "the environmental importance" and "the economic contribution" that Strangford lough makes through employment, tourism, leisure and fishing etc. Those are all exceptionally important in our communities, particularly in these times of high unemployment. This Assembly has a duty to provide jobs and opportunities to all in the community, and Strangford lough has the potential to do just that in various ways.

I have heard the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Arlene Foster, speak on numerous occasions of the beauty of Strangford lough and the tourist opportunities that it can provide. That is correct, provided, of course, that what happens is done correctly, with no detrimental effect on the lough or its environs. I am particularly concerned about its environs. I am desperately concerned at this time and have raised the issue with Minister Attwood. There is a new development at Killyleagh, and there are worries about effluent getting into the lough. I think that Willie Clarke mentioned that problem. There is also a planning proposal for development on high ground on the Portaferry side of the lough, just outside Newtownards, which, if allowed, would have a devastating effect on the skyline and the lough's coastline. Those things must be avoided. I appeal to Minister Attwood to stop the destruction before it goes any further. We want to encourage visitors and tourists, and they do not want to look at monstrosities of apartments.

As a member of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee, I was informed of the concerns of the Ulster Wildlife Trust. We raised the problem, as our Chairperson

said, with Minister O'Neill. She responded with an analysis of her Department's restoration plan and how, with the agreement of local fishermen, two non-fishing zones were introduced. AFBI Northern Ireland has assessed pot fishing in the lough. It states that pot fishing had little adverse effect on the modiolus, a clear case of saying that the fishermen are not to blame for the situation we find ourselves in or the slow restoration of the reefs. A similar experiment was carried out in Wales, and exactly the same thing was said after that investigation.

I support DARD in not implementing an excessive non-disturbance zone. I have a copy of the plan. We should await the joint initiative from DARD and DOE under the headings of protection, intervention and monitoring. In all those areas, the local fishermen are fully supportive, and I welcome Minister O'Neill's acknowledgement of the livelihoods of fishermen and others who depend on Strangford lough as their main means of income. That DARD commitment is in line with the final sentence of the motion:

> *"to ensure that people who derive an income from the lough are not economically disadvantaged."*

[Interruption.] No, I will see you at the end. I want a healthy, vibrant, lively and clean Strangford lough. I woke up this morning, and the litter on the lough outside my front door was unbelievable. We had had strong winds. The users of the lough need to take that on board. People can make a living from Strangford lough, partake and enjoy their leisure and sporting activities on a lough whose water and coastline is protected.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr McCarthy: I will not support a total ban on fishing that will leave more people out of work and on the scrapheap. We must not add to the already desperate plight of fishermen in Northern Ireland, including Irish Sea fishermen. I hope that Strangford lough can overcome those problems. I know that both Ministers are dedicated to ensuring that we have a good clean Strangford lough for locals, fishermen and visitors.

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I welcome the debate. Before commenting on it, I convey my best wishes to the Chinese community and all the community on the Chinese new year.

Given that we are talking about issues involving the welfare of fishermen, it is only appropriate that I acknowledge the recent deaths off the coast of Cork. Even as we speak, two bodies are still to be recovered following that terrible tragedy. I pass on my sympathy and that of the House to all those involved.

I welcome the debate. The Hansard report should be circulated among all members of the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee and the Environment Committee and among senior officials in both Departments. I have a sense that the content of the debate was qualitatively different from what might have been anticipated in some circles. The Hansard report should be required reading for all senior officials in the Departments, both on my environment side and in DARD fisheries.

I think that something was beginning to converge around the Chamber, which it is important to hear here and tomorrow at the meeting in London between DARD and DOE officials and European Union officials to discuss the matter.

1.30 pm

Anna Lo said that this was the time to resolve the issue. I concur in this regard: although I understand Ray Seed's frustrations and, indeed, looking at the history of this matter, the reason for frustration, nonetheless I want a message to be sent clearly from the Chamber on the eve of the potential infraction meeting in London that work is ongoing, there is an urgency for more work to be commenced and this is the time when Departments and this House are determined to resolve this matter once and for all.

In addressing the matter, we have to be on the right side of the habitats directive; we also have to be on the right side of the avoidance of infraction and on the right side of protecting our environment. It is against those three standards that we should be judged.

I acknowledge what Anna Lo, Danny Kinahan, Michelle McIlveen and others said, namely, that in Strangford lough we have a unique piece of nature in Europe. There is no more protected zone in Europe than Strangford lough. Of the 2,000 species in Northern Ireland, 1,500 are found in Strangford lough. Over and above all its other designations, it is one of only three marine nature reserves in Britain and the North of Ireland. That is the scale of what we have in Strangford lough.

As I keep saying — a bit like my other phrase about being in Government and being in power — we are uniquely blessed in this part of Ireland in the scale and volume of built, natural and archaeological heritage that we enjoy. It gives character to our lives and creates enormous economic, tourist and other opportunities.

As Arlene Foster and I learned last week, the SeaGen tidal project is now viewed as the birthplace of tidal energy and a world reference point for tidal energy as part of the wider narrative of renewables being, arguably, the single biggest economic opportunity that this part of Ireland has.

People spoke about the modiolus modiolus, or, more widely, the biogenic reefs in Strangford lough; it is our own small version of the Great Barrier Reef. That is its importance in international and European understanding. Although it may be small in scale, it is very important in the ecology of that area. However, the modiolus, or biogenic, reefs in Strangford lough measure in various places the mere size of a dinner plate, whereas decades ago they measured 7ft x 4ft x 3ft in places. That is the scale of the deterioration that has been suffered in the lough over all these years, and that was touched upon by many Members.

In understanding how that has come about, however, let us disregard some of the reasons suggested as contributory factors in the debate: there is no evidence over recent years of an increase in pollutants in Strangford lough as was suggested by, perhaps, Paul Frew. If there are pollutants, they are nitrate-related, but there is no evidence in recent years of any increase. That is the view of the DOE and DARD. Therefore, in assessing how we have come to this, let us filter out the suggestions that do not measure up to the science.

For reasons outlined, I do not intend to detain the House. Over the past 20 years, because of concerns about what was happening to the modiolus in Strangford lough, there have been various interventions to try to mitigate the impact. Crucial to that was the 2006 restoration plan that was drawn up because of the damage that was being caused to the modiolus and which was submitted to Europe. We should be judged against that, and we should judge ourselves against that, as regards mitigating the impact of what was going on. To answer Paul Frew's question: a revised version of the restoration plan was submitted to Europe earlier this month, and we await further word back from Europe about its judgement of that plan, part of which, no doubt, tomorrow's meeting will deal with.

We have to judge ourselves against the 2006 plan. We cannot wish it away or pretend that it does not exist, and we cannot pretend that Europe will disregard it. The plan stated that, within one year, the areas in the lough that continued to have modiolus should enjoy total protection zones. That is what our direct rule Government said that we would do. We have to judge ourselves on that fact alone, and we will be judged on whether that and all the steps that we have taken since are sufficient to convince Europe that we are on the right side of infraction.

We need to get our heads round the issue of infraction. The minimum fine that would be visited on the United Kingdom as part of infraction proceedings — and rest assured that the London Government will pass it on to us — is £7 million, with the risk of £500,000 a day thereafter. If the fishing industry in Strangford is worth £140,000 a year, as Mike Nesbitt said, or £190,000, it would take 35 years to pay off the minimum fine that Europe might impose. Although the work of fishermen is very valued and is an income stream for those who work the lough, we, as Government, have to be responsible and recognise that the scale of penalty compared to the scale of financial benefit to people in the lough is, arguably, disproportionate.

In anticipation of the meeting tomorrow with officials in London, I will outline the remedial measures that have been, and are being, put in place to reassure the House and Europe that work is being done and that the pace and scale of what we intend to do will now escalate. As Members have indicated, there are two total protection zones in the lough already. DARD and the DOE have agreed that there will be two more zones. Michelle McIlveen may or may not be accurate when she says that it is too little too late, but there will be two more zones in which all fishing will be banned. My Department, arising from the new agreement with —

Mr Wells: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Attwood: Yes.

Mr Wells: Obviously, we welcome the additional two zones. However, as the Minister has seen from the map that was circulated by the Ulster Wildlife Trust, the present no-take zones are tiny in comparison with the area formerly occupied by modiolus. Will he give us some indication as to the extent of new zones that he is advocating?

Mr Attwood: Yes. I will share that information with the Environment Committee. There are two new boxes, beyond the two that are part of Strangford lough, in which there will be a no-fish zone. One of them is quite awkwardly shaped, which gives rise to a whole range of enforcement issues, but that is another day's work. There are two further areas that capture significant parts of the lough.

I do not deny that that is still less that the recommendations of the scientific report from Queen's last May, which suggested that the middle section of the lough in totality should be a no-catch zone. I recognise that. However, Members, including Mr Wells, have touched on the issue of how Departments — the DOE and DARD in particular — manage that. I recognise that the scale of our proposals is not the same scale as scientists' proposals. Nonetheless, it is a more significant intervention in respect of no-fish zones in Strangford lough than any that has taken place heretofore. We will see very quickly whether that keeps us on the right side of European infraction proceedings and convinces the European authorities that despite our uncertain progress on the matter over the past number of years, we will now create certainty, avoid doubt and do all that we need to do on the issue.

The third matter, which I was about to deal with before Mr Wells's intervention, is that the Department of the Environment is drawing up by-laws that will govern diving, anchoring and mooring in the lough. In that regard, I want to acknowledge the fact that we have had useful conversations with the yachting fraternity to ensure that it is reassured. Given what people have said about Strangford being a unique asset in Europe, its positive development and exploitation for fishing, recreation and other purposes needs to be scoped out fully.

The fourth point is that we have undertaken proactive restoration measures. Some modiolus reef is being translocated from pristine sites to other parts. There are indications that translocation has had some early success. In going forward, there will be more experimental work on artificial restoration. Modiolus larvae will be grown artificially in an effort to encourage its growth and development in the lough. In that regard, I say to the House and to Europe that if one judges where we are at present against the restoration plan in 2006 and measures that against the Queen's University scientists' recommendations of May 2011, we are further down the road than we were previously. However, we have not finished that journey. Consequently, tomorrow, I will put the best interpretation of our current position and the best argument to officials in London. I accept that although we are closer to favourable conservation status, which is the ultimate test, than we were, there is a long way to go.

I acknowledge the fishing industry's needs. However, I agree with Mr Wells's sentiment, which is that if there is to be sustainable fishing anywhere, including in Strangford lough, the degradation of the lough's fishing opportunity requires a revised approach. Remember that, not too long ago, people collected oysters and caught 200 lb skate in Strangford lough. All that commercial fishing is gone now.

That leads to my final point: unless DARD and the DOE manage those issues together, we will always be on the wrong side of best practice. Until there is a marine Bill, marine plans for Strangford lough and elsewhere, and, in my view, a marine management organisation that gathers together all interests in an effort to resolve disputes and best protect the marine environment, we will continue to be on the wrong side of best practice.

Mr Hamilton: I am pleased to conclude the debate on behalf of the Committee for the Environment, which brought the motion to the Floor. I want to make a few points on its behalf. It is clear from the contributions, for which we are all very grateful, that the sustainability of Strangford lough interests people beyond the Strangford constituency and, indeed, South Down. We had contributions from Members for North Down, South Belfast, North Antrim, South Antrim, East Londonderry and West Belfast. Everybody spoke about the need for a sustainable Strangford lough. They all agreed that Strangford is a beautiful place. I believe that I heard them say that it is much more beautiful than their own constituencies. Therefore, I think we can agree that progress. That is good.

1.45 pm

There has been real value in having this debate because it sends a message not only to the Minister and DARD, but, hopefully, to Europe, that this legislature is taking the matter seriously and requires and expects action to be taken off the back of it. That is an important message, and, if nothing else comes out of the debate, that is a valuable thing that we have done today.

It was a balanced motion in its crafting, and you saw that reflected in a balanced debate. It has always been very important for me representing the constituency that we need to have not only a sustainable lough but a sustainable fishing industry. I want to point out that the Committee will continue to take an ongoing interest in this subject, and we are scheduled to take evidence from some fishing interests, the Ulster Wildlife Trust and the Department. Therefore, this issue does not end for the Committee for the Environment today or for the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development. We will continue to monitor it carefully, particularly as the outworkings of the agreed plan go forward, and the resulting conclusions of Europe in respect of that. Therefore, the Committee will continue to take a very close interest in the issue.

I do not need to repeat what everybody else said, but Strangford lough is a real gem and is a huge asset to this country. As many Members said, it has had virtually every possible marine designation attributed to it, and that is something that we should be deeply proud of.

During my time as an elected representative here and elsewhere, I have done everything that I possibly can to try to promote the area more, because, even though it is a gem, it is a hidden gem for many. I do not think a lot of people appreciate it and I do not think some of us living there appreciate just how much beauty we have on our doorstep and the diversity that there is in the lough.

It is in nobody's interest who wants to promote the lough not to have a healthy, sustainable lough in the longer term. There is no doubt that damage has been done to the modiolus and to the horse mussel beds, and we could have a debate from now until eternity about the actual cause of that. There is no conclusive scientific proof of the exact cause of some of the ongoing damage, but, without a doubt, nobody can dispute that we need to find a solution because we have the risk of infraction charges coming down the line. However, that solution needs to be balanced, and, as well as restoring the modiolus, it needs to include a future for the fishing fleet. Fishermen sometimes feel a bit like pantomime villains because of the way the debate has been conducted in the past, and they feel that they are the bogeymen, are somehow to blame and are the only cause of this problem. I think that is an unfair characterisation. When we talk about the fishing fleet, it is worth pointing out that it is a small fishing fleet. It is not the huge Spanish fishing trawlers that you hear about. These are tiny boats. There are 23 vessels in total and only six people are engaged in it on a full-time basis.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hamilton: Yes, very briefly.

Mr Wells: Does the Member agree that it was noticeable that there was no mention of additional compensation in the Minister's contribution? If further restrictions are to be brought in, compensation should be introduced to mitigate the loss of income that could arise. It would have been helpful had the Minister outlined what that is going to be.

Mr Hamilton: Yes. I heard the Member mention compensation earlier. I am sure that the fishermen would not be against compensation, but it would be interesting to see what the compensation is for and whether any is available. We will maybe touch on some of those points later.

Pot fishing now seems to be the target for some as to what should be eliminated to save the horse mussel beds. We have had a ban on trawling and dredging. Many Members said that there is no conclusive proof that pot fishing is doing the damage that people say. There are various studies, and our own AFBI produced a report that said that no evidence has been found in relevant scientific literature at this time to prove that pot fishing activities cause damage to modiolus. The Welsh Government also engaged in a study on modiolus and found that the prohibition of all fishing gear would be seen as a disproportionate response with regard to fisheries management and that officials believe that such a measure would unfairly disadvantage fishermen using static gear for no overall benefit to the reef.

The meeting with the European Union tomorrow was mentioned, and the Minister said that he could rule out certain causes for damage. Again, there is some debate about that, but Europe and the agenda that is being put forward to the meeting tomorrow for discussion states that the key impacts on the modiolus appear to be disease, climate change, eutrophication from agriculture sources and pot fishing. Therefore, even at that level, there is some dispute as to what the principal and other causes are. Those things need to be borne in mind.

The contribution of the fishing fleet to the wider economy cannot be missed. People come to Strangford lough for a variety of reasons. They come for the leisure pursuits that Paul Frew mentioned or the scenery that Michelle McIlveen talked about. However, some also come for the cuisine. We have chefs such as Danny Millar at Balloo House, who not only prepares local produce in his restaurant but extols its virtues on national television. We also have wily entrepreneurs such as Bill Wolsey who bought the Portaferry hotel. He did that in the knowledge that that he could tell his customers that the produce that they eat was caught in the lough that everyone can see from the restaurant and landed at the harbour just outside. Therefore, the fishing fleet makes a wider contribution. The hundred-and-something-thousand pounds contribution that was referred to is

only a point of sale; it bears no resemblance to the wider economic contribution. People come to the area because of the cuisine and because they are offered what is caught —

Mr Agnew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hamilton: I will if you are very brief.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. I will try to be brief. Does he agree that, if we are to continue to derive employment and enjoyment from the lough, the sustainability of the modiolus population and other species in the lough is essential? Does he also agree that it is important that we have no-fishing zones for that reason?

Mr Hamilton: I will come to that in a second. I repeat that it is no one's interest for the long-term sustainability of the lough to be lost. However, if we seek to create exclusion zones that are one third of the size of the fishable lough in the interest of sustainability, but they decimate and probably ruin the fleet, there will be no one left to benefit from that future sustainability. We need a balanced approach.

The vilification of the fishing industry in Strangford lough has sometimes ignored its willingness to compromise. As Kieran McCarthy and others mentioned, the fleet has come forward with its own proposals for greater closed areas and has agreed to subscribe to a voluntary code of practice. Also ignored is the work that the fleet has done in the restoration of oyster, scallop and lobster stocks in the lough. The vilification of the small number of fishermen in Strangford lough is unfair and unjustified.

There is a real fear of infraction proceedings. It has been avoided before, and it is unfortunate that we are now in that position again. I understand the argument that was put forward by the Ulster Wildlife Trust and that it felt that it had nowhere else to go. However, I question the way in which that organisation took its action. If its whole idea was to bring greater concentration and focus to the issue, it should have come to the Committee for the Environment. We could have had that debate without the fear of infraction, and the millions of pounds that that could suck out of our Budget and the Northern Ireland economy, hanging over us. I am one of those who subscribe to the view that we have enough problems from Europe without inviting further ones, as the Ulster Wildlife Trust has done.

As Mr Kinahan mentioned, we could blame bad leadership. However, at this stage, it is not important who we blame. We need to take decisive action quickly and find a solution that will restore and protect the modiolus. That solution must also ensure that the fishing fleet — it fishes produce of high quality and of huge value to the local economy and which is exported and served in fantastic restaurants around the world — is protected. We must find a solution that is as balanced as the debate has been.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly recognises the environmental importance of Strangford lough and the economic contribution it makes through employment, leisure and tourism; and calls on the Executive to introduce, as a matter of urgency, measures to protect and restore its modiolus habitat in a way that meets the requirements of the EU habitats directive (92/43/EEC); and further calls on the Executive, when implementing such measures, to ensure that people who derive an income from the lough are not economically disadvantaged.*

Private Members' Business

Schools: Pupils Living in Poverty

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes in which to propose the motion and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes in which to propose and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Flanagan: I beg to move:

> *That this Assembly notes that one child in four is living in poverty; calls on the Minister of Education, with support from the Executive, to target extra resources at pupils living in poverty to enable them to succeed at school; and further calls on the Minister to ensure that schools are accountable for using their funding to help children who are living in poverty to realise their full potential.*

Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom an rún a mholadh agus a rá go bhfuilimid sásta glacadh leis an leasú.

I am happy to bring the motion to the Assembly for discussion, and we are happy to accept the amendment. The context for the motion arises from a Save the Children event that was attended by MLAs. The young ambassadors involved chose the topic "less opportunity in education for those living in poverty." My party intended that Daithí McKay would move the motion today, but because of events last Friday, he is now busy worrying about the traumas of being a new father and having a son, as opposed to worrying about child poverty. Nevertheless, I am sure that it is still at the forefront of his mind.

First, the evidence is there in black and white that academic selection discriminates according to social class, and that working-class children are affected most as a result of selection. Recent figures released by the Department of Education totally expose the fallacy that grammar schools accept pupils on the basis of academic ability. Indeed, those statistics demonstrate that a child's chances of attending a grammar school are dictated by the affluence of the area in which they live rather than their academic ability.

There are large swathes of the North in which academic selection is no longer used and where, in recent years, some grammar schools have dropped it altogether. The sky did not fall in when that happened. Those schools are still of an educationally high quality and they continue to deliver for their students. The debate on post-primary schools needs to move away from academic selection and on to the need for children to be able to choose a wider variety of subjects at Key Stages 4 and 5 to fit their individual needs. Education needs to be primarily about the needs of the child and not those of particular institutions.

The fact is that those who are born into a less well-off community are of equal ability to those born into more affluent areas. The differences are solely environmental, and those include the gross and outdated mechanism of academic selection. The Department of Education has put a number of initiatives in place to address the important issues of child poverty and under-attainment, such as the extended schools programme, the expansion of free school meals, and school uniform grants. Other initiatives, such as the education maintenance allowance provided by the Department for Employment and Learning, have proven to be successful and need to be supported and extended, where possible.

A recent report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation showed that, despite government policy aimed at keeping the cost of primary school uniforms as low as possible, parents often reported spending about £50 on each child's uniform, excluding the cost of shoes. Some of the older children were keenly aware of the cost to their parents of school uniforms. There was also evidence to suggest that some schools, even in highly disadvantaged areas, displayed an inflexible attitude to uniforms. Their policies forced children to wear blazers that must be purchased from certain retailers at a cost of more than £100. School trips often proved expensive; there were examples of children being encouraged to go on skiing trips costing over £1,000. That is not feasible for people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Children and parents generally welcomed healthy eating policies in schools but felt that school dinners did not provide enough tasty and healthy options. The poor quality of meals in some school canteens meant that children who might rely on the school dinner as their main meal of the day refused to eat what was on offer. The cost of school dinners was prohibitive for families who were not entitled to free school meals but who had several children at school. Dinners in school are very expensive, with very little to be got for less than £3·50, unless you take one of the specials. They often bear no comparison with the quality of dinner available, for example, in the Assembly restaurant. The fact that prices are often lower here is astounding. Coupled with that, a pint of milk is more expensive in schools than it is in this Building. That needs to change, and I look forward to seeing some progress on that in the future.

A significant number of boys in the most disadvantaged schools were shown to start disengaging from school at the ages of nine or 10. That shows the extent of the problem that we are facing. The evidence has also shown that the impact of poverty on children's attainment levels is more extreme by the age of 10. In 2001, around 40% of pupils in schools with high levels of free school meals provision were not reaching level 4 in English or maths at Key Stage 2. By 2010, that figure had dropped every year and now sits at around 30%. In 2000, around 30% of pupils who were entitled to free school meals left without five GCSEs or the equivalent at grade C or higher.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

That figure continued to rise until 2005-06, when it started to fall. It now sits at around 17%, a figure that is still far too high and which is twice the average for all pupils. However, it shows that the current initiatives are working and that, perhaps, more can be done. I look forward to hearing more about the ongoing review of the current funding arrangements for schools to see how progress can be made on that.

2.00 pm

Outcomes in the education system cannot be measured solely by exam results. The real value of such measures

can be determined only by the wider impact on society as a whole. One way in which I would like more progress is through the use of school facilities to serve the entire community outside of the school's traditional opening hours. That would have a particularly beneficial impact on deprived and disadvantaged communities and on isolated rural communities such as many in my constituency. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response to that.

Every child should be given the same opportunity to succeed at school. Failure to achieve in public exams damages future job and training opportunities. Some Departments have made efforts to resolve that, but all Departments need to step up to the mark together to ensure that child poverty issues are addressed. The current British Government policy is adding to the problem and leading to greater child poverty. Those policies are making a bad situation worse. Job cuts, wage cuts and cuts to social welfare are adding to the pain without curing the disease. Economic growth is the only way to address a fiscal deficit. The Tory-led austerity drive is hurting ordinary families while driving the economy further into recession. The Executive need to put forward their own agenda to address child poverty and economic recovery to improve the lives of all our citizens.

Mr McNarry: I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after the first "poverty;" and insert:

> *"further notes that early offers of family help and support can improve health and educational outcomes, reduce youth offending and increase lifetime opportunities; calls on the Minister of Education, the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, with support from the Executive, to target extra resources at pupils living in poverty to enable them to succeed at school; and further calls on the Minister of Education to ensure that schools are accountable for using their funding to help children who are living in poverty to realise their full potential."*

I am pleased to present the amendment to the House, and I am grateful to the proposers of the motion for tabling a debate on what is an extremely important matter. The amendment seeks only to add to the motion, and I trust that the House will welcome the opportunity to add strength to what is, as I have said, an issue of significant importance. Underneath the message that is contained in the motion and the amendment lie deep-rooted anxieties, about which society is perplexed, embarrassed or unwilling to fully admit the extent of the problem. I suspect that it is a cocktail of all three.

That said, the subject matter remains a blight on society and an uncomplimentary comment on non-action to promote a positive, collective response to put it right. The issues confronted in the motion and the amendment do not begin at school but at home, and, lamentably, for too many young people, they remain with them throughout their adult life. Let it be said that, while there may be a world of difference between living in poverty and being poor, in our society, we are not talking about third-world poverty but about poverty as we know it. I trust that we are also saying, as I certainly am, that all people, quite rightly, have their pride and their dignity. Of course, we all have our dreams. Therefore, if the amendment is to mean anything to the Ministers who are mentioned and to the collective of the Executive, it can and should be supported. Accordingly, if the amendment is to jerk minds and penetrate through to those on whom it is calling for action, it must also reach out and demonstrate to them that people in poverty can go beyond dreams and think of reality. Today, I hope, the Assembly is calling for better opportunities to be given to children to enable them to realise their full potential.

Because problems facing children who live in poverty are complex, they cannot simply be dealt with in an education context. That may be part of the solution, but it is far from the whole solution. We have to recognise that schools often have to battle against a youth culture outside the school that elevates ignorance and sneers at education and learning. Tackling what has become a systemic and deeply seated problem in our society as a whole will need a broader remit and context than simply an education one. That is why the amendment broadens the motion's scope to include those wider societal issues. Those issues include the gang culture that pervades many poorer, working-class districts; the exploitation of young people by unscrupulous criminal elements; the dumbing-down effects of popular culture and youth culture; and that terrible sense of hopelessness and worthlessness that is induced by inter-generational unemployment and deprivation.

Way back in 2002, Norman Warner of the United Kingdom's Youth Justice Board said:

> *"Not only do the truants offend far more the nature of their crimes is … more serious."*

The links between truancy and crime are well established and have been the subject of many academic papers, including, for example, those, of the youth out of the education mainstream (YOEM) initiative in the United Sates. There, truancy is seen as a stepping stone to delinquent and criminal activity. A recent report compiled by the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) on factors that contribute to juvenile delinquency concluded:

> *"chronic absenteeism is the most powerful predictor of delinquent behavior."*

Truant students are at a higher risk of being drawn into behaviour that involves drugs, alcohol or violence. A California deputy attorney general who handles truancy cases said that he had:

> *"never seen a gang member who wasn't a truant first."*

I think that that applies in our community as well.

Several studies have documented the correlation between drug use and truancy. Sticking with America, a report from the University of Maryland found:

> *"51 percent of female juvenile detainees not in school at the time of their arrests tested positive for drug use."*

Another study, by the US Department of Justice's drug-use forecasting programme, reported:

> *"more than half … of a group of 403 male juvenile arrestees in San Diego … tested positive for drug use when taken to juvenile hall. Not surprisingly, those who did not attend school were more likely (67 percent versus 49 percent) to test positive for drug use than those who did attend."*

Closer to home, in the Ards council area of my Strangford constituency and in parts of affluent North Down, the truancy level is 138 per 1,000 pupils, with less than 85% school attendance. In the council area, there are desperate black spots. Per 1,000 pupils, Ballyrainey's truancy level stands at 260 truants; Central's at 215; Comber East's at 152 ; Donaghadee South's at 203, Glen's at 300; Gregstown's at 150; Loughries's at 173; and Millisle's at 145.

Mr Speaker, you will be astounded, as will be my constituents and those of North Down, to read those figures. I was astounded. Those are figures that are not normally associated with the constituency that I represent, but they are there and they are facts.

I would like to touch on one aspect of the motion. Recently, it was revealed how far the Programme for Government had met its child poverty targets. The First Minister and the deputy First Minister said that they measured poverty in three ways: relative, mixed and absolute. Absolute child poverty decreased dramatically from 29% to 19% under the first Assembly mandate, between 1998 and 2003. Thereafter, absolute child poverty levels flattened at 16% to 17% during the second mandate, apart from a dip in the final year — 2006-07 — when it fell to 12%. However, absolute child poverty once again rose to 16% to 18% in 2007-08. In 2008-09, it was 17%. In 2009-2010 — the most recent year for which figures are available — it rose to 18%. So to characterise child poverty levels as one child in four living in poverty is not strictly accurate. I refer Members to the work of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in the first mandate, when the drop in absolute child poverty levels from 29% to 19% — a drop of almost 35% — was dramatic. I am not making any particular party political point in that reference, but clearly there was something done at that time that was right and that was impressive. We, as an Assembly, need to re-examine our predecessors' work from that time to see what different circumstances, if any, exist today.

Absolute child poverty levels now stand somewhat lower than one child in five, but let me be very clear: no matter what the level of poverty is, there is no doubt that it is too high. No one wants to see underachieving children from low-income backgrounds, or any background, succeed more than I do. I want to see every child's potential fully realised, and that is what the amendment and the motion are about. I happen to believe that the House and its Executive really care about such an issue. That is why, with your permission, I am asking the Assembly to support the amendment to the motion.

Mr Storey: I support the amendment tabled by the Ulster Unionist Party, and thank the Member for the comments that he made in speaking to the amendment. I thought that, when we had the unceremonious removal of the previous Education Minister, we were embarking on a new era in education — an era in which there would be a constructive, informed debate around the issues of education. Unfortunately, it seems that it has not reached as far as Fermanagh, because the proposer of the motion, instead of addressing the core issues at the heart of his proposals, took yet another opportunity to have a go, a swipe and a dig at a sector in our education system, namely, the grammar schools.

Blame it on someone. Pin it on whomever you like, but do not give any blame to the party that happens to have had the portfolio for Education for the last five years. It is everybody else's fault, but it is not mine, Jack. I say to the proposer of the motion that it is regrettable that the tone and content at the start of his proposals were way off the mark. We only have to look at the Bench opposite and ask those who are so vociferous in attacking the grammar system how many parents opposite had the benefit of having a grammar school education.

Let us move on to a question that was posed by the Member. He asked: what has the Department of Education done? We now have a range of policies — it was called a suite of policies by the previous Minister. Those were going to be so pivotal in changing the outcomes for our children. Let us look at some of them. Let us look at what the Minister announced last week in the House around preschool admissions. The Minister believes, on the premise of what he said, that, if you have a sector that is, according to the inspector, not achieving the outcomes that are desired in the way that it should, namely the voluntary and community sector, as opposed to the statutory sector, what you do is give that sector more money. So the answer to all our ills is found in addressing the disparity and inequality of funding.

I doubt that that is the rationale that is being used, but if that is the real reason, if that is the premise, why are we not addressing the disparity in the funding that is going to our primary schools as opposed to our post-primary schools? That would hit the issue of the problem that the Member rightly addressed — that one in four of our children, 30%, are leaving primary school without having reached level 4 of attainment in numeracy and literacy. We need to have an open and honest debate around that issue. I am seriously concerned that the Minister's proposals that he set out last week around preschool admissions will not address the outcomes but might satisfy some elements within the sector. That is not the way to make policy.

2.15 pm

'Count, Read: Succeed' has the potential to be a vehicle to improve children's outcomes in numeracy and literacy, but it will not do it of itself. The Minister knows and his officials, who are present in the Chamber, know that I brought to the Minister a project relating to a number of schools in south Ballymena in my own constituency, including Camphill and Ballykeel. I specifically asked the Minister to look at a CARTS project, which would give those schools an additional tool to deliver better outcomes for their young people. What did the Department say? It said, "It does not add value. You are not able to do it within the confines of the classroom from 9.00 am until 3.00 pm. We are sorry; it just ain't going to be funded." The bottom line is that we were not asking for one penny. We were not going to the Minister asking for money. A process and plan to deal with a problem was in front of the Minister. It was not costing the Department of Education a single farthing, but it said, "Sorry; it does not fit."

Either we are prepared to deal with poverty and underachievement —

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

Mr Storey: — or we are prepared to allow the blame game to continue and to take responsibility away from where it rightly lies, which is in the Department of Education.

Mr McDevitt: I join colleagues in expressing our best wishes to Mr McKay as he departs on a new set of responsibilities in this life.

The SDLP is happy to support the motion and the amendment. I congratulate the proposers of the motion, because it is very timely that we are debating the impact that some of the actions of Ministers are having on children, particularly the most vulnerable and marginalised children in our communities.

Like many colleagues on the Education Committee, I have the privilege of visiting schools from time to time. Since early December, the invites have been coming in thick and fast. In fact, in the past week, I spent time in three primary schools in south and west Belfast. Those primary schools are in what would be described as deprived areas, where the vast majority of children would be considered poor. The story in those schools is a very stark one: it is a story of regression. I am told by teachers and parents that where there were school counsellors, there are now none; where there were homework clubs, there are now none; where there was in-school speech and language therapy, there is now none; where there was a pupil:teacher ratio on the right side of 30 pupils, there is now the absolute certainty of a pupil:teacher ratio on the wrong side of 30 pupils. So the sad reality of life in our region is that, for primary-school children from our most deprived backgrounds, things are worse today than they were last year. The unfortunate and sad consequence of our budgeting process is that they are likely to remain in a very bad place.

If we are serious about child poverty, we also have to be serious about funding primary schools, particularly schools in our most deprived neighbourhoods. Frankly, we also have to be very courageous about wanting to extend rights to children in this region, not deny them. Surely the right that we should be debating today, at a time when child poverty is such a significant issue, is the right of every three-year-old to have proper access to a preschool and nursery place. Surely the signal that the Executive and the Minister of Education should be sending is that he is interested in installing in children the rights that will protect them from poverty rather than presiding over cuts that are delivering them further into poverty. It is not acceptable to bring motions to the House that identify the problem if, in your actions as a fully participating party in the Executive, you are not willing to fund the things that will address that problem.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. I think that he has hit the nail on the head. The motion is probably a precursor to what the Minister will announce over coming weeks, and that is probably the real reason why it is before the House.

Mr Speaker: The Member has an added minute in which to speak.

Mr McDevitt: I thank Mr Storey for his prophecy. It is Monday, of course; that might have been a matter for yesterday's events. Let us hope that that is the case and that the motion is, indeed, teeing us up for some good news. However, in the primary schools that I have visited in the past two weeks, the damage has already been done: the speech and language therapists are gone; the counsellors are no longer there; the homework clubs are not taking place; and the breakfast clubs are under threat. What we will be left with is the basic architecture of a school, with a higher number of pupils in every classroom. That is the most disadvantaged way in which to address child poverty and the most unilluminated way in which to try to teach children who are at the most disadvantage.

Let me conclude by saying this: if the motive behind today's motion is, indeed, to say that things are going to turn, I will be the first to welcome it. However, I think that I have a duty to come to the House and tell colleagues how things are today, and the sad reality is that child poverty in this region is worse today than it was a year ago.

Mr Lunn: We also support the amendment. As Mr McNarry said, it broadens the scope of the substantive motion and acknowledges that other contributions are needed to impact on the problem.

The amendment and the motion both call on the Minister:

> *"to ensure that schools are accountable for using their funding to help children who are living in poverty to realise their full potential."*

For me, that raises this question: is there an implication that schools have not been doing that up to now or, at least, doing their very best in the constrained conditions in which they work? The motion is from Sinn Féin and is directed at a Sinn Féin Minister, which is quite unusual. So perhaps the Minister can indicate what, if anything, he thinks schools could have done in recent years beyond what is already happening.

The amendment refers to family help and support, lifetime opportunities, health outcomes and the need to reduce youth offending, and there is recognition of the fact that the problem goes way beyond anything that schools can do. That points to the obvious contradiction that the motion would perhaps be better directed at OFMDFM, which, at least, has reporting responsibility under the Child Poverty Act 2010. Merely asking for the targeting of extra resources at pupils living in poverty to enable them to succeed at school misses the point to some extent.

Child poverty is a complex problem; it goes way beyond income differentials or education outcomes. It is about entire communities being marginalised from the mainstream, with children growing up not just in difficult financial circumstances but, in fact, entirely isolated. They have poverty of connection, poverty of aspiration and poverty of certainty about their position in their community. It is easy to trot out statistics, but establishing the real quality-of-life impact on the children themselves and, indeed, on society as a whole, from which those children are marginalised, is in all our interests, and I think that it will take a lot more than extra resources to tackle that.

We have put money towards tackling child poverty for decades, particularly in the decade after the agreement. However, it has made almost no difference. The difference will not be made by the amount of money that we throw at the problem but by the efficiency with which we use that money and, importantly, by the efficiency with which we allow other people, probably more expert than us, to use it. The issue is identifying the actual pathways to poverty and tackling them to prevent differentials and inequalities occurring in the first place. No one expert in the matter seriously disputes that, for a start, that means — I think

that we all agree on this — targeting resources at early years. A child's prospects are already largely determined by the age of three, so intervention is required in those very early years. We must recognise that intervention does not necessarily mean state intervention. Often, the best programmes — such as Dr B's, which is run by Barnardo's; Sure Start, which we all applaud; and some of the Bryson services — are delivered by the third sector. They are delivered best when those organisations are allowed to get on with things rather than being hindered by constant administration.

The motion says nothing that is not already in the Programme for Government. We can all sign up to improving literacy and preschool education, but we should ask ourselves exactly how we propose to do that. Additional resources are already pledged in the Programme for Government. When the Minister responds, I would like to hear precisely what the signatories to the motion would do with those additional resources. Would they seek to tackle family breakdown? Would they focus only on educational outcomes? Would they aim to enable parents to get into work and be positive, socially integrated role models? Would they look at tackling addiction or parental debt?

As for the schools side, I have to say that the motion leans towards the assumption that schools are solely responsible for tackling child poverty. Schools are responsible for delivering the curriculum. Is the implication that parents do not have a responsibility? I do not think so. Is the suggestion that we should not look at the role of youth clubs, community groups or even churches in all of this, and perhaps empower them? The real issue is precisely what we are going to do about pupils living in poverty and, just as importantly, what other agencies and individuals can do about it.

The motion is deficient in its focus solely on government money and government-funded schools. We all have a responsibility, not least as parents and communities. We cannot afford to ignore that fact in any way. We support the motion and the amendment, but I look forward to the Minister's response.

Mr Speaker: As Question Time commences at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House take its ease until that time. The debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member called to speak will be Michelle McIlveen.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Speaker: Question 6 has been withdrawn and a written answer will be made.

Ministerial Subcommittee on Children and Young People

1. **Mr Lynch** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the ministerial subcommittee for children and young people last met. *(AQO 1093/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): A Cheann Comhairle, with your permission, I will ask junior Minister Anderson to answer that question.

Ms M Anderson (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): The ministerial subcommittee on children and young people, which Jonathan Bell and I jointly chair as junior Ministers, last met on Wednesday 11 January 2012.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. Will the Minister give us an update on membership and attendance at the meeting?

Ms M Anderson: Membership of the ministerial subcommittee includes all Ministers. Five Ministers were in attendance at the most recent meeting on 11 January. Departmental officials represented those Ministers who were unable to attend. The five Ministers who were in attendance at the ministerial subcommittee on 11 January were Education Minister John O'Dowd, Agriculture and Rural Development Minister Michelle O'Neill, Culture, Arts and Leisure Minister Carál Ní Chuilín, junior Minister Jonathan Bell and me.

The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) has appointed a policy lead on children and young people, and she will assist us in co-ordinating the work across Departments.

Mrs Overend: I thank the junior Minister for her answer. A priority for the subgroup should be ensuring adequate provision for young people in care. What engagement has she had with organisations such as the Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC) and Kinship Care to ensure that targeted interventions are made?

Ms M Anderson: I met one of those groups as an MLA. However, a number of subcommittees within the ministerial subcommittee are working on that. We cover a number of areas. For instance, the ministerial subcommittee on children and young people is focusing on five priority areas: safeguarding, NEETs, special educational needs, early years and vulnerable young people.

As I said, OFMDFM has recently appointed a lead who is working on matters in relation to children and young people,

and that should be of some assistance to the organisations which you mentioned. We intend to discuss a number of proposals to streamline the work across Departments to deliver improved outcomes for children and young people at the ministerial subcommittee meetings scheduled for April and June.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the junior Minister for her answers so far. Was the child poverty action plan discussed at the last meeting? Is it possible for her to give us an update on it?

Ms M Anderson: I am sure that the Member is aware that there are two ministerial subcommittees. One, which junior Minister Jonathan Bell and I co-chair, deals with children and young people in a 10-year strategy. There is also a ministerial subcommittee, co-chaired by the First Minister and the deputy First Minister, which deals with poverty and social inclusion. For that, Jonathan Bell and I co-chair the stakeholders' forum. In those meetings, we have dealt with departmental and non-departmental members and with the action plan on child poverty. However, a question has been scheduled for today which asks about child poverty.

Mr Agnew: Although the creation of the ministerial subcommittee on children and young people was welcome, it is time that we moved beyond Ministers and Departments simply talking to one another and towards working together. Does the junior Minister agree that a statutory duty on Departments to collaborate on the planning, commissioning and delivery of children's services would help us do that?

Ms M Anderson: There have been many discussions on that particular subject, but OFMDFM has put a policy lead in place and we believe that that is one mechanism through which we can get a co-ordinated and collaborative approach across Departments. Our Department has responsibility for progressing work on key children and young people's policies under the auspices of the Executive's overarching 10-year strategy for children and young people. Through that strategy, we aim to ensure that, by 2016, all children and young people will be fulfilling their potential. We will achieve that by improving outcomes for children and young people in six areas. To that end, we have developed an outcomes model that has gone to all Departments, and we hope that it will assist us in targeting the most vulnerable. We have gone past the stage of discussions and are progressing work in that field so that we get the outcomes required for the most vulnerable children.

Police Ombudsman

2. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they will be advertising for applications for the post of Police Ombudsman. *(AQO 1094/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): Advertisements inviting applications for appointment to the post of Police Ombudsman were published in the press in mid-December 2011, with a closing date for returned applications of 20 January 2012. Further details of the vacancy and application packs have been available from the websites of OFMDFM and the Office of the Police Ombudsman. It is planned that interviews will be held in February.

The Member asked us, in AQW 3993/11-15:

> *"to detail the timescale for the recruitment to the post of Police Ombudsman."*

Our response referred to the totality of the appointment process rather than to specific plans for press advertising. At that time, we were still finalising the full arrangements for taking the process forward.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for that update and a somewhat different response from that to my earlier question. Who was consulted on the decision to appoint an interim ombudsman?

Mr M McGuinness: That is the responsibility of the Department of Justice. As the sponsoring Department, it has the responsibility of ensuring the continuity of the functions of the Office of the Police Ombudsman. On 17 January, the outgoing Police Ombudsman announced his intention to delegate his statutory functions to appropriate levels within his office, pending the appointment of a new Police Ombudsman. He also announced that he did not intend to resign formally until the new Police Ombudsman was appointed. That is the third position on the timing of his resignation that Mr Hutchinson has adopted since last September. He adopted his latest position on the basis of legal advice that he received. His legal advice differs from that provided by the Attorney General to the Department of Justice. We have seen that advice, which confirms to our satisfaction that the Office of the Police Ombudsman can continue to function during a vacancy.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I want to pick up on the deputy First Minister's final point. The legal advice given to the current ombudsman led him to say that he could not resign until the new ombudsman was in post. Has the deputy First Minister any view on the legal opinion that he received?

Mr M McGuinness: It was the Department of Justice that sought legal advice from the Attorney General. Having seen that information, we are satisfied that the Office of the Police Ombudsman's continuing to operate during a vacancy would not in any way affect its functions. Obviously, it is a very unusual situation. As I said, Mr Hutchinson's current position is the third that he has adopted on the timing of his resignation since last September. We are now informed that he took his latest decision on the basis of legal advice that clearly conflicts with that of the Attorney General. Be that as it may, the situation needs to be dealt with, and our work of pursuing the appointment of a new Police Ombudsman continues. Applications are closed, and we look forward to the completion of interviews in February and to receiving from those responsible for those interviews a report on the most suitable candidates. In the aftermath of that, the First Minister and I will decide who will take up the post.

Mr Hussey: Does the deputy First Minister believe that there was undue political interference in the work of the current Police Ombudsman, Mr Hutchinson?

Mr M McGuinness: There has been a lot of discussion about this over the past number of months and, indeed, years. There have been a number of situations that brought the whole debate around the Police Ombudsman into considerable public controversy. Much has been written about that. I am not going to dwell on past events. We have to deal with the reality, which is that we are now faced with a situation where there is a responsibility to appoint a new Police Ombudsman. That work will be pursued diligently by

those who have responsibility to put that in place. I look forward to the appointment. Obviously, anybody coming into such a position and all those involved in such an appointment have to reflect on the past and on the duties and responsibilities of the Police Ombudsman in a way that allows that office to get on with its work. That is vital to community confidence and to recognising the challenges that lie ahead, in the context of not just the work of the Police Ombudsman but the far bigger question of how we deal with the past.

Referendums

3. **Mr Dallat** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether their Department has a policy on whether it is the right of a devolved Administration to determine the timing and parameters of a proposed referendum within a devolved region. *(AQO 1095/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness: This is a matter that is within the context of the devolution settlements and the relevant legislation. We do not, therefore, intend to offer comment today on what might be the views of Scotland or Wales on their respective legislative powers concerning the holding of referendums. We are subject to the provisions of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, which provides a broad framework of rules to regulate the conduct of any referendum held as a result of an Act of the Westminster Parliament. In addition, the position for us in relation to the holding of a referendum on constitutional matters is clear: the 1998 Act contains specific provisions relating to the holding of a poll in relation to a change to the current constitutional position. The commissioning of such a poll is the responsibility of the Secretary of State in response to the perceived wishes of a majority of those eligible to vote.

Mr Dallat: Mr Speaker, I thank the deputy First Minister for his very comprehensive reply. Does he agree with me that it is the right of any nation to have mechanisms in place to decide its future and can he assure me that we are still in line for a united Ireland in 2016? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I will leave it to the deputy First Minister to respond, but supplementary questions need to relate to the original question. This particular supplementary question certainly has taken some legs. I really have to say that to the Member.

Mr M McGuinness: There will be a lot of people wondering what the Member has done in the past to achieve a united Ireland. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr M McGuinness: The issue of the Scottish referendum first came into our domain when the First Minister and I attended the meeting of the British-Irish Council in Dublin. While a lot of very important issues in relation to youth unemployment and the misuse of drugs were discussed, we all had the sense to know that such a big media attendance at the event suggested that the press conference afterwards was not going to be about youth unemployment or the misuse of drugs but would be about Scotland, Alex Salmond and the dispute that his Administration are in vis-à-vis 10 Downing Street. My sense at that time was that the issue could be used to create divisions in this House, within our Executive, or even between the First Minister and me. All of us should resist the temptation to be drawn in to something that will be decided elsewhere. We have our own duties and responsibilities. We have our own agreements, stretching back to 1998 and through to the St Andrews Agreement and the Hillsborough agreement. What we do is abide by the agreements that we have made and get on with our duties and responsibilities. What happens elsewhere has to be a matter primarily for the people concerned. My attitude is that we would be best advised to steer clear of it.

2.45 pm

Victims and Survivors Service

4. **Mr McElduff** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Victims and Survivors Service. *(AQO 1096/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness: The Victims and Survivors Service remains a key issue for our Department, and we are committed to making available all resources to ensure that the service is established by 1 April 2012. Key milestones have been achieved to date, and the transition arrangements are in hand to ensure that there will be no gap in support to victims and survivors. Specifically, an interim management team has been established to develop the service. The team will continue to liaise with the sector to ensure that the service is focused on meeting the needs of victims and survivors.

The First Minister and I requested that junior Ministers chair monthly meetings with the commission and officials to ensure that the service is delivered. The First Minister and I also maintain regular contact with the commission on the issue. It is our intention to make a statement to the Assembly on the further detail of the service in the near future, and the OFMDFM Committee is scheduled to discuss progress towards the establishment of the service on 8 February.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer. I ask him to provide additional detail on the interim arrangements for the service.

Mr M McGuinness: An interim transitional management group has been established and is making arrangements to liaise with the sector to provide it with more detailed information on how the new Victims and Survivors Service will operate. The group will also work with the sector to establish the capacity of the groups that have been supported by OFMDFM in anticipation of the service being established. Funding is in place to ensure that there is no loss in provision, so any individual or group in receipt of funding should see no difference in the service being provided. Interim staffing arrangements will soon be announced to ensure that the sector has the confidence to engage fully in the development of the new service, and the First Minister and I will make a statement providing more detail on that.

Mr I McCrea: Will the deputy First Minister give an assurance that victims of terrorism will be put front and centre of any new service? Will he join me in condemning

the mindless terrorist attack on Ballymacall Orange hall at the weekend?

Mr M McGuinness: It is important that all victims are put front and centre of our efforts to deal with what is a very sensitive issue. I absolutely join the Member in an outright condemnation of the burning of the Orange hall. I do so without reservation.

Mr Nesbitt: Will the deputy First Minister assure the House that the staff of the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund and of the victims section of the Community Relations Council will be offered jobs in the new service, thereby ensuring that the skills, experience and expertise that they have gathered through the years will be retained and not lost?

Mr M McGuinness: As we move forward with our new arrangements, it is important that we do not lose the experience that has been gained over the years in dealing with that important issue. However, there will be rules and regulations on how it will be dealt with. No doubt, as the situation progresses, all of that will be taken into account.

Mr A Maginness: The establishment of a Victims and Survivors Service has been long in gestation, and we look forward to its imminent birth. However, half a million pounds was unspent in this area of government activity, and that has —

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to come to his question.

Mr A Maginness: Yes. Sorry, Mr Speaker, but you are putting me off. *[Laughter.]* The half a million pounds that was not spent has now been spent on staffing needs, even though the service that the deputy First Minister outlined is not yet in operation. Will he please explain that?

Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM budgeted to have the Victims and Survivors Service operational by the end of 2011, but a delay in establishing it has led to some of the money earmarked for it in the current financial year being returned. Money handed back does not affect the funding going to individual victims or groups working in the sector.

Institutional Child Abuse

5. **Mr Doherty** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the historical institutional abuse inquiry.
(AQO 1097/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will ask junior Minister Anderson to answer the question.

Ms M Anderson: Go raibh míle maith agat.

Since I last updated Members in December on the progress that has been made in addressing historical institutional abuse, further work has been carried out to implement the decision to establish an inquiry, acknowledgement forum and advocacy service in support of victims. We have identified the legislative requirements to give the inquiry panel the necessary powers to compel people and documents. Officials have been instructed to begin preparation to bring statutory proposals to the Assembly for consideration. We are considering potential candidates for the inquiry panel, and that work is being actively pursued. Work is under way to establish an acknowledgement forum, through which victims and survivors will have the opportunity to recount their individual experiences to the inquiry in a sensitive and confidential environment. Potential candidates have been identified, and we are in discussions with them. We are working to identify premises for the inquiry in Belfast city centre and in Derry. We are committed to establishing an advocacy service that will provide support for victims and survivors before, during and after the inquiry. Currently, interim arrangements are in place.

Mr Doherty: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for her answer. The Minister will be aware of concerns regarding legal costs, given the experience in the South with the Ryan inquiry. Can she indicate the extent of the legal involvement in the process envisaged here?

Ms M Anderson: We understand and share the concerns that the Member has flagged up. The inquiry will be victim-centred and non-adversarial in its approach. In our discussions, the victims made it very clear to us that they are not on trial and so should not need lawyers. To quote a submission from the Survivors and Victims of Institutional Abuse (SAVIA): "We are not looking for the equivalent of a Ryan inquiry. The time, the expense, the over-lawyering and the dodging that took place right up to the end did more harm than good to the victims. We need to ensure effective support is in place. Money spent on support is better placed than money spent on lawyers."

In our wider consultation, everyone has made it clear to us that we need to guard against the cost of the over-involvement of lawyers in the process. However, to ensure that victims have the necessary support to provide evidence to the inquiry, we will offer legal support to assist them. We do not envisage that the cost of the inquiry will bear any resemblance whatsoever to the legal fees paid out in the Ryan inquiry.

Mr Campbell: Obviously, the wider community has considerable sympathy for the victims of the abuse that the historical institutional abuse inquiry will look into. However, does the junior Minister understand the concern in the wider community that cost may well be a significant factor, particularly when many of those who were abused were abused at the hands of those who worked in the Roman Catholic Church's institutions in Northern Ireland, but the wider community might be expected to pick up the tab?

Ms M Anderson: It will be up to the inquiry panel to make findings with regard to who was at fault and the nature of the abuse. I am very conscious of the fact that there is concern about the cost of the inquiry. On considering all the evidence, we believe that the inquiry panel will provide a report to the Executive detailing institutional or state failings in their duties towards children in their care. The inquiry panel will make recommendations on redress and reparation to be provided to meet the needs of victims and survivors.

Mr Cree: I thank the junior Minister for her response so far. Given that the inquiry has been on the agenda for a long time, can she indicate what the budget is for the inquiry and what the details of the costs involved are?

Ms M Anderson: The business case is still being actively pursued and considered. You also mentioned the time frame for the inquiry. I believe that the First Minister and deputy First Minister acted very promptly once the matter was brought to their attention. It was agreed with the victims and survivors groups that we needed to bring the matter

to a conclusion as soon as possible but that it was also important that we take the time to ensure that the process was right and mistakes were not made now that might cause any undue delay or prolong the suffering at a later stage. It is very important that we do not re-traumatise the victims. The inquiry and investigation will conclude within two and a half years of the commencement date. The chairperson will be required to provide a report to the Executive within six months of its conclusion.

Mr Speaker: Question 6 has been withdrawn.

Social Investment Fund: Consultation

7. **Mr W Clarke** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they will publish the results of the social investment fund consultation. *(AQO 1099/11-15)*

Mr M McGuinness: The public consultation on the social investment fund proposals ended on 23 December 2011. During the consultation period, six public events were held, at which initial proposals were outlined and then discussed in detail. Attendance at those public events was high, with almost 240 participants.

During the consultation period, our officials also met a number of key statutory bodies and other Departments. That was with a view to ensuring that the social investment fund complements other area-based initiatives. We received over 300 formal consultation responses, which our officials are analysing. That will help to inform final proposals for operational arrangements for the fund.

Although several key issues have already emerged, it would be wrong for me to detail those in depth until all the input to the consultation is fully reflected on. We hope to be in a position to publish a consultation report in the coming months. In parallel, we will develop and bring to the Executive final proposals with a view to having the fund fully operational as soon as possible.

Mr W Clarke: The Minister said that there were over 300 responses. In the light of that, will he give us an assurance that there will be no delay in allocating funds, and that the allocation will not have to wait until all other areas have their plans agreed?

Mr M McGuinness: It is important to acknowledge that the unspent moneys have been reprofiled. They have not been lost, thus retaining the overall value of the fund at £80 million. That is in contrast with the past when funding was lost because it was unable to be spent within particular timelines. Our decision to reprofile is a demonstration that we are genuine in seeking to assist those in greatest objective need.

Of course it is important to make the social investment fund operational and to get money on the ground to meet the needs of communities as soon as possible. Many respondents focused on the distribution of funds. It is our intention to put in place mechanisms for allocating money as early as possible so that communities can get on with tackling poverty and deprivation and to avoid any underspend in future years.

Mr Swann: With regard to the social investment fund, will the deputy First Minister outline the definition of "dereliction", which, according to the draft PFG, will be allocated half of the £80 million of the total fund?

Mr M McGuinness: It is very important that people recognise that we are dealing with an issue where in many different parts of the North there is an incredible amount of dereliction. With regard to the employment situation in different communities, there is a huge body of work to be tackled and undertaken.

The social investment fund is designed to face up to all the challenges that are clearly there. In the consultation, we sought the views of local communities because we believe that local communities know best. In the course of the consultation, we will take on board all the views, including the different interpretations, of local communities about what social dereliction and unemployment mean for them. At the end of that process, after analysis, we will put together programmes that fit the particular circumstances in individual areas. They will not be the same right across the North. In all those areas, we will find considerable differences.

3.00 pm

Justice

Mr Speaker: Question 3 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer.

Prisons: Full-body Searches

1. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the steps that have been taken to find an effective and less intrusive method than the full-body search in prisons as outlined in recommendation 8 of the prison review report. *(AQO 1107/11-15)*

9. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Justice what progress is being made in relation to recommendation 8 of the review of the Northern Ireland Prison Service. *(AQO 1115/11-15)*

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 1 and 9 together.

Significant progress has been made on the implementation of the prison review team's recommendation 8. Prison Service officials conducted an extensive review of the capabilities and limitations of full-body imaging scanners. The review is now complete. I received a copy of the report at the end of last week and, following discussion with officials, will consider the findings and whether there is any scope to consider a pilot of alternative search technologies in Prison Service establishments.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle, gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra.

I thank the Minister for his answer. If the technology that he is appraising takes us to a higher threshold than the current full-body search, will he implement it?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr McCartney for that question. I can certainly assure the House that, if it is possible to find a technology that provides greater dignity for prisoners and prison staff in dealing with the issue of contraband being smuggled in or out while maintaining the absolute essential

that is the security of prison establishments, the Prison Service and I will be willing to move, if that is the case.

Mr Eastwood: It is reassuring to hear that answer from the Minister. Of course, we all know that security is a given when we are finding any answer to the problem. Can he assure the House that the issue of resolving the protest at Roe House is one of his top priorities?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Eastwood for that positive comment. Finding an alternative to full-body searching was covered in the prison review report. Dame Anne Owers and her colleagues were absolutely clear that it is an issue on which she urged the Department to take action in the interests of prisoners and staff in all three prison establishments. Although we are certainly committed to resolving the outstanding difficulties in Roe House, the Prison Service is conducting itself in accordance with the agreement of August 2010 as best it can in current circumstances, including dealing with the issues around full-body searching.

Mr Givan: The Minister will be aware that Colin Duffy was campaigning on the issue at the weekend. Does the Minister want to comment on his release from custody? What is the Minister doing to review how the criminal justice system managed that case?

Mr Speaker: Order. I know that Members have imaginative minds when it comes to supplementary questions. Certainly, that supplementary question has very little to do with the original question. I will leave it to the Minister to decide whether he wants to answer, but, on this occasion, the Member has gone outside the original question.

Mr Ford: I will deal with ministerial responsibilities. I will leave it to the judiciary to deal with its responsibilities.

Mr Nesbitt: Will the Minister update the House on the scope, scale and substance of any ongoing negotiations about full-body searches and tell us who has been involved?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Nesbitt for his interest, but there have been no discussions in the terms as he put them. The Prison Service has carried through recommendation 8 of the prison review report. It has sought alternative technologies and has looked at practice elsewhere. I will study the report, which I received only at the end of last week, in detail with officials to see whether it is possible to make progress.

Mr Dickson: Will the Minister confirm that the commitments that he gave in August 2010 about searching are being met?

Mr Ford: Yes. The commitments that were given about reducing searching in Maghaberry prison were carried through as best they could be by the Prison Service. However, no commitment was given not to include full-body searching on entering and leaving prison. That remains the situation in all three prisons in Northern Ireland, as it is elsewhere in the United Kingdom. That continues to be the position in the absence of suitable alternative technologies.

Prison Service: Exit Scheme

2. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the Prison Service exit scheme. *(AQO 1108/11-15)*

Mr Ford: The voluntary early retirement scheme was launched on 8 November 2011. Following its launch, 636 staff expressed an interest in applying to it. On Friday 20 January 2012, individual calculations of payments were issued to those 636 individuals. They have until 17 February to submit a formal application to leave under the terms of the scheme.

Mr Moutray: I thank the Minister for his response. Along with other Members, I am aware of complaints emanating from Prison Service members with regard to what is perceived to be poor advice and communication on tax implications and national insurance contribution issues connected to the scheme. How many staff have indicated that they wish to participate in the scheme? Will the Minister undertake to ensure a full and detailed consultation on tax implications and national insurance contributions?

Mr Ford: I was unaware of the level of concern that Mr Moutray has expressed. I repeat that, to the best of my knowledge, no individuals have formally expressed their application to leave since they received their terms and conditions last Friday. If there is an issue about tax and national insurance, it may be that the Prison Service is not the best body to give advice to its employees. I will certainly look into that.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Minister mentioned 17 February in his answer. When will a timeline be available to show when sufficient numbers of staff will actually leave under the exit scheme and the new recruits, who are needed to change the culture in the Prison Service, will be brought in?

Mr Ford: I thank Ms McCann for moving the process on a little bit. Certainly, the timing of individual releases will very much depend on progress on implementing the strategic efficiency and effectiveness (SEE) programme in general, particularly with regard to the grades, specialisms and expertise of individual members of staff. Staff will be kept informed as details come to light. Clearly, at this stage, when no formal applications have been made at all, it is not easy to give that level of detail. I have no doubt that Committee members will hear more about it in coming weeks.

Mr B McCrea: Minister, I was surprised to hear your answer to Mr Moutray's question. Are you sure that you are unaware of concern among prison officers about the tax implications of the exit scheme? When will you be in a position to tell us exactly how many people will take up that offer?

Mr Ford: I am slightly surprised by the Member's question. I said what I said to Mr Moutray because it is fact. That is the basis on which I answer questions in the House. We will know how many people have applied when applications formally close on 17 February. The House will be informed of the position then.

Mr Allister: In regard to the prison reform package, I note that the present Justice Minister is the First Minister's first choice to continue in that post, even though the First Minister threatened to resign a few weeks ago over his attitude to symbols. Does that indicate that the Justice Minister has abandoned futile attempts to change the badge, name and symbols of Her Majesty's Prison Service?

Mr Speaker: Order. Once again, the Member knows fine well that he is totally out of order. The question that he has

asked the Minister has absolutely nothing to do with the original question. Let us move on.

Mr A Maginness: Can the Minister reassure the Assembly that, for the full implementation of the exit package scheme for prison officers, there will be a full and comprehensive settlement with prison officers' representatives on restricted practices and overmanning, so that there is a full balance in relation to the scheme?

Mr Ford: Mr Speaker, I fear that Mr Maginness has just managed to slide within your boundaries by asking that as a supplementary question. Of course, the issue of how the Prison Service is managed as part of the SEE programme's ongoing reforms will be absolutely essential. Discussions are ongoing with the Prison Officers' Association and the Prison Governors Association on the details of the reforms and restructuring at this stage. However, the specific terms of the exit scheme are, of course, something for individuals to apply for rather than for formal negotiation with the unions.

Mr Speaker: Question 3 has been withdrawn.

PSNI: Recruitment Contracts

4. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the value of contracts awarded to the PSNI for the employment and deployment of agency, consultant and associate staff in the PSNI in each of the last five years. *(AQO 1110/11-15)*

Mr Ford: The awarding and management of contracts by the Police Service is an operational matter for the Chief Constable, for which he is accountable to the Policing Board. I am reassured by the active interest that the board is taking in examining the issue. I believe that the Assembly and the public should have confidence that the accountability mechanisms for the PSNI are working effectively.

Mr McElduff: I thank the Minister for his answer. Public expenditure of this scale is surely and most certainly his concern. Will the Minister expand on his recent communication with the PSNI regarding those contracts? Essentially, what is being done to address the growing concerns that public money is being misused?

Mr Ford: I am not sure what communications the Member refers to, but I can only repeat the point: it is the job of the Policing Board to hold the Chief Constable accountable, and 10 Members of the House are members of that board. I will not interfere with the operational responsibility of the Policing Board, and I respect the current policing architecture, which leaves those issues specifically for them and the Chief Constable.

Mr S Anderson: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. To what extent does the Minister feel that the use of consultants and others has been caused by the loss of so much policing expertise and experience through Patten?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Anderson for the question, but I regret that he is also asking me to intrude on the responsibility of his colleagues and other MLAs and nine independent members of the board.

Mr Hussey: Does the Minister fully support the comments of the Deputy Chief Constable about the associates:

> *"They do absolutely fantastic work in some very challenging areas and their experience and expertise is of huge benefit to us. It makes eminent sense to employ staff of significant experience for a short period of time on a time bound contract. We have a plan to manage our reliance on this down over the next year but there will be some areas where we still need to maintain expertise for a period beyond December 2012 that we cannot provide out of our resources."?*

Mr Speaker: Do we have a question from the Member?

Mr Hussey: Sorry?

Mr Speaker: Do I detect a question there somewhere?

Mr Hussey: The question was that I quoted directly from the Deputy Chief Constable and asked the Minister if he fully supports her comments.

Mr Ford: Mr Hussey also had an inventive question. Although the Deputy Chief Constable, like the Chief Constable, is qualified to comment on operational matters, I am not.

Mr McDevitt: Can I — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I would like to hear this Member ask a supplementary question that might relate to the original question.

Mr McDevitt: Such confidence, Mr Speaker. I declare an interest as a member of the Policing Board, so as to make sure I do not incur your wrath twice. Does the Minister fully support the principles and full implementation of the Patten report? Does he further agree that it is abnormal, to say the least, that, of the 399 people currently deployed in the PSNI as associate staff, 304 are former members of that service who received severance payments under the Patten scheme?

Mr Ford: Mr McDevitt asked two questions. With regard to the first, as Minister of Justice, I fully support the arrangements for policing architecture, which were in place when I came into office and continue in place, including the role for the Policing Board and the operational responsibilities of the Chief Constable and his team. He asked a second question, which is for himself and his colleagues on the Policing Board.

Jury Service

Mr Hamilton: Mr Speaker, let us see if we can get an answer from the Minister on this one.

5. **Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister of Justice whether he has given any consideration to a review of jury service. *(AQO 1111/11-15)*

Mr Ford: The Member will be aware that I am currently consulting on the question of the upper age limit for jury service. The closing date for that consultation is 10 February, after which I will consider the responses and report to the Assembly's Justice Committee.

I also intend to consult on the eligibility for jury service of people suffering from a mental disorder. As it stands, there are differing opinions on the definition of mental disorder and whether it properly serves the purpose of excluding and

including the right people for jury service. I will announce a date for that consultation in due course.

Regarding the operational aspects of jury management, the Member will also know that the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) carried out a review of the management of jurors and published its report in April 2010. The report found that the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) was meeting the demands of the system by providing sufficient juror numbers to ensure the smooth running of criminal trials. It also noted that a customer service ethos had been applied to jurors to ensure that their experience of the system is positive and that the ongoing internal evaluation and review of jury administration and management by NICTS is in line with good practice. A survey conducted by CJINI during the inspection found that 93% of jurors reported a good or satisfactory experience of jury service. Given the positive messages in that report, I do not consider it necessary to undertake a review of jury service at this time. However, the Courts and Tribunals Service reviews the operational arrangements periodically to identify scope for improvement.

3.15 pm

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Minister for that answer. In taking forward any review, will he consider the issue of the employers and employees who can be inconvenienced by the lateness of notification of their need to appear on a jury the next day? That has been brought to my attention and, I am sure, to the attention of colleagues in the House. Will he show some sympathy to those individuals in how the operational structure of jury service is administered in Northern Ireland?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Hamilton for his supplementary question, which, I accept, deals with a significant issue for a small number of people. There is an operational difficulty in that it is generally not possible to state who will be required for the next day's jury service until a specific day's business has been completed. The Courts and Tribunals Service has been exploring ways to manage juror management to make it better. For example, following the reduction in the right to challenge specific jurors, it has limited the number of jurors who are required and, in some cases in some County Court divisions, it has split jury panels into two, so that not as many people are necessarily on standby. A further survey will be conducted over the next few months, starting from next month, which will seek specific views on those issues and on the possibility of reducing the time for which a jury panel is in place from four weeks to two weeks. We trust that that will provide some reassurance to the Member about what is sought.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister assure the House that he is fully committed to the retention of trial by jury and that any changes to the system will be minor and will support the continuation of that system?

Mr Ford: I am so astounded by a second relevant supplementary question that I can hardly answer. I remain absolutely committed to the concept of trial by jury. Clearly, we are all aware of a small number of circumstances in this jurisdiction in which that is not possible. However, it is my belief that jury service is one of the best ways to guarantee free and fair trials for all. It forms a part of our democratic system which we should alter at our peril.

Mr Cree: The Minister referred to the 2010 'Management of Jurors' report. Will he advise the House what progress his Department has made in responding to the recommendations contained therein?

Mr Ford: I am unsure of Mr Cree's specific references. However, if he wishes to write to me, I will follow them up.

Anti-social Behaviour Orders: East Belfast

6. **Mr Newton** asked the Minister of Justice how many anti-social behaviour orders were issued in the East Belfast constituency in 2010-11. *(AQO 1112/11-15)*

Mr Ford: I have been advised that no anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) were issued in the East Belfast constituency in 2010-11. It is the responsibility of the relevant authorities — the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the district councils — to make a decision, on a case-by-case basis, as to whether it is appropriate to make an application for an anti-social behaviour order.

Although ASBOs have a role to play in tackling antisocial behaviour, it is important to stress that they do not provide the full answer. Members will be aware that, in Northern Ireland, we have adopted a staged approach to tackling antisocial behaviour. Through that, anti-social behaviour orders are used in a proportionate manner, alongside other measures including community-based projects, such as the Street by Street project that, I know, the Member is aware of in his constituency, support programmes, mediation, diversionary activities, verbal and written warnings and acceptable behaviour contracts. That staged approach has contributed to a reduction of over 20% in the incidences of antisocial behaviour across Northern Ireland since 2008 and a reduction of over 17% in East Belfast. The community safety strategy, which I intend to launch in March, will aim to build on that success as we work towards achieving safer, shared and confident communities.

Mr Newton: It will come as a shock to residents of East Belfast who suffer antisocial behaviour that not one anti-social behaviour order was issued. However, I accept what the Minister says, and I pay tribute to initiatives such as Street by Street and to Alternatives for the work that it does. I ask the Minister to support such initiatives through the PSNI to continue to address the levels of antisocial behaviour.

Mr Ford: I welcome Mr Newton's comments. I can assure him that the Department and its agencies will continue to work, as they have been doing. That work has shown a significant reduction in antisocial behaviour over the past three years.

Mr Copeland: Does the Minister have a view on whether the reorganisation and renaming of district policing partnerships will ease the way in which we currently look for solutions in dealing with those found guilty of antisocial behaviour?

Mr Ford: One of the key driving forces behind the creation of the new policing and community safety partnerships, which bring together the functions of CSPs and DPPs, is that it will enable a more joined-up approach. It will enable the police to operate as partners alongside other agencies and ensure

that a holistic approach is taken to tackling problems such as antisocial behaviour. The proof will be in the pudding, and there will be a lot of responsibility at local level, but I trust that Mr Copeland's prediction is correct.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for his response and welcome the 17% reduction in antisocial behaviour in East Belfast in recent years. I join colleagues in commending the work of East Belfast Alternatives and Street by Street in those efforts. In addition to the new policing and community safety partnerships, what work is his Department doing to encourage collaboration across Departments to tackle antisocial behaviour?

Mr Ford: Antisocial behaviour is covered, in large measure, by what the Department of Justice is leading on, which is collaborative working in disadvantaged areas with the involvement of other agencies and Departments. Specifically, at this stage, that involves six pathfinder areas, including Ballymacarrett. Since the pathfinder areas were established in the middle of 2011, there has been a particular focus on youth provision, both physical and infrastructural, and youth engagement. However, there are different issues that show that, if we are to tackle some particular problems where there is a significant incidence, we really need the joined-up working of which the Member spoke. There is no doubt that the Department of Justice has been able, since devolution, to work in a more joined-up way with other Departments that will have even greater effect.

Mr Agnew: I have recently had it confirmed that two premises in Dundonald are using Mosquito alarms as part of their attempts to tackle antisocial behaviour. What is the Minister's view of the use of such alarms, and has he any plans to regulate their use?

Mr Ford: This is the first that I have heard of it from the Member. If he has the details of specific premises, I would be interested to hear about them. It is certainly my understanding that there are major problems with Mosquito alarms being used in areas where, for example, young children might suffer from their use without being aware of the reasons why. We need to be very careful before individuals who have commercial premises to protect conduct such activities. If the Member wants to follow up with details, I will happily respond.

Non-molestation Orders

7. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the process for obtaining a non-molestation order to ensure maximum protection for vulnerable people. *(AQO 1113/11-15)*

Mr Ford: Domestic violence is a serious problem, and I want to ensure that maximum protection is afforded to vulnerable people who are the victims of such violence. In December 2010, I announced a change in the legal aid rules to provide increased assistance for victims of domestic violence. I authorised the Legal Services Commission to waive the upper earnings and capital limits for persons applying for non-molestation orders (NMOs), and that means that more people now have access to legal aid in order to protect themselves and their family from domestic violence. Although a contribution towards costs may be required, it will be a fixed, one-off amount that should ensure that victims of domestic violence need no longer worry about the financial implications of seeking an NMO for their protection. During a 12-month pilot, the waiver meant that legal aid was granted to 104 applicants who previously would have been refused legal aid and might otherwise have found it difficult to afford to apply for a non-molestation order. I have now indicated that the waiver arrangements are to be continued on a permanent basis. I am pleased to say that those new arrangements have been largely welcomed, particularly by Women's Aid, which works closely with many victims of domestic violence.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his answer. Given the high levels of domestic violence here, can he give the House assurances that any change in the process of serving non-molestation orders in respect of domestic violence will be carried out by the PSNI?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Boylan for the question. I cannot give such an assurance, because some matters will be operational issues for the Chief Constable. However, I have discussed the issue with the Chief Constable. I have put to him the view that has been widely put to me about the benefits of non-molestation orders being served by a police officer in uniform rather than by any other agent of the court. The police have advised that any changes in the method of service will be introduced only when they and the Courts and Tribunals Service are satisfied that the new arrangements are reliable and fit for purpose. That remains the position until we see that arise.

Mr I McCrea: I welcome the Minister's commitment to continuing the waiver. Will he join me in calling on everyone who has been affected by domestic violence to come forward to the PSNI or other relevant authorities to try to ensure that it is removed from our society?

Mr Ford: I agree with Mr McCrea. I hope that anyone who is a victim of any kind of crime will take the information to the Police Service. With domestic violence, there is a particular difficulty and danger that some individuals may feel so threatened that they cannot report it. However, it is clear that, by improving access to NMOs and by other work that we are doing to support victims, we are putting in place all that we can to make that easier for victims. It is a matter for each individual, and I hope that individuals will hear what Mr McCrea has said.

Mrs Overend: Can the Minister provide an insight into what the problems are with the serving of non-molestation orders? Why is there some consideration of that being changed?

Mr Ford: I thank Mrs Overend for the question. The issue is that, because of the number of police officers available in Northern Ireland to carry out particular duties compared with the number that there were some years ago, there are pressures on operational policing in a number of areas. That is why the Chief Constable believes that it would be possible to move away from the current system, since, elsewhere in these islands, police officers are not involved in serving non-molestation orders. He is fully aware of the concerns that are felt across the community and the benefits that are seen from police involvement in that.

Youth Justice Review

8. **Mr Beggs** asked the Minister of Justice to outline his plans to implement the recommendations contained within the review of youth justice system report. *(AQO 1114/11-15)*

Mr Ford: The public consultation on this report and its recommendations has only recently closed, and, indeed, we are still awaiting responses from a small number of organisations that requested an extension. It would therefore be premature to comment on the way forward at this stage or to discuss specific plans for the implementation of any of the recommendations.

I am very pleased with the number of formal responses received to date, several of which are from organisations that represent and have direct engagement with children and young people. The Department has held public meetings on the report and its recommendations, as well as commissioning separate pieces of work from different sectors and constituencies, including those representing children and young people, older people, parents and victims.

Overall, the level of response and obvious thought that have gone into the comments received to date reflect a clear understanding of and widespread interest in this important subject. I assure Members that taking forward the outcome of the review is a priority for me and for the Department. However, it is important to emphasise that a number of the key recommendations are cross-cutting and engage the responsibilities of other Departments. In developing any plans for implementation, I will therefore consult ministerial colleagues to agree the way forward and how we might work in partnership to deliver the required outcomes. The Committee for Justice has a significant interest in the issue, and I look forward to sharing my emerging conclusions with Members and taking their views as part of the implementation process.

Mr Beggs: The Minister of Education previously had a children's strategy. Will this Minister agree that, to reduce the number of young people coming into conflict with the criminal justice system, it is important that there be an all-encompassing strategy, involving health, education and justice?

Mr Ford: I agree with Mr Beggs that it is incumbent on all of us to work together, particularly in the area of prevention, in which, as he highlighted, Health and Social Services, along with Education, has a greater role than Justice in preventing young people coming into the justice system and assisting them out of it when they become involved through criminal activity. That is the point of the partnerships that we have been trying to work on, whether by CWDA, PCSPs or the ongoing work in this area.

3.30 pm

Question for Urgent Oral Answer

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Royal Jubilee Maternity Service, Belfast: Neonatal Unit

Mr Speaker: I have received notice of a question for urgent oral answer under Standing Order 20A to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the situation at the neonatal unit at the Royal Jubilee Maternity Service, Belfast.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): First, I have expressed my deepest sympathy to the parents and other members of families who are grieving the loss of their babies, and I reiterate that in the House. I am sure that that sympathy is extended from the entire House.

So far, the pseudomonas bacterium has been found in six babies associated with the outbreak in the Royal Jubilee Maternity Service neonatal unit. Of those babies, three died in the neonatal unit and one recovered from pseudomonas but later died from an unrelated cause. Two babies have recovered from the infection and are still in the neonatal unit. Further tests for pseudomonas have not shown any new cases of infection in the outbreak, and the total remains at six. The neonatal network is managing well. Some mothers due to give birth or babies who require special neonatal care may be transferred to another unit, as would be normal practice. That will be on the basis of specialist clinical advice to ensure that babies receive the most appropriate care.

All the babies in the unit have now been screened and parents have been informed of their baby's result. At this stage, five babies who have the pseudomonas bacterium on their skin have been identified, but that is not causing active infection. Babies continue to receive the neonatal care that they require. As a precautionary measure, the babies' skin may be screened again as the situation requires to see if they are carrying the bacterium. All necessary precautions are being taken to avoid the spread of infection.

Bio-decontamination of the intensive care part of the neonatal unit at the Royal Jubilee Maternity Service is now complete. The affected area in the unit at the hospital will remain closed while a team of specialists continues to attempt to identify the most likely source of the infection. All other maternity services and wards at the Royal Jubilee Maternity Service are fully operational and working as normal. Expectant mothers should attend their appointments as scheduled.

Pseudomonas bacterium is an organism that can be found in many natural environments, including soil and water. Infections are seen mainly in immunocompromised and debilitated patients. Outbreaks of pseudomonas have occurred in intensive care facilities around the world, because patients in such facilities are frequently

immunocompromised. The trust, the Public Health Agency (PHA) and the Department are continuing to manage and monitor the situation, and a teleconference is in progress at present. The situation is evolving and further updates will be issued.

Mr Wells: I thank the Minister for his answer. I concur with him: this must be a devastating thing to happen to the three families involved who, having come through the grief of having a premature baby, faced the ultimate horror of their child dying.

The Minister spoke at length about the situation in the Royal neonatal unit. What steps has his Department taken to ensure that there is no trace of or problems with that particular infection in other neonatal units? What is being done to make absolutely certain that the infection does not spread outside the Belfast hospital?

Mr Poots: In conjunction with the Chief Medical Officer, the PHA has developed guidance to ensure that there is regional consistency in case definition, in reporting requirements and in screening advice. That guidance will be implemented across all the trusts.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I take the opportunity to thank the Minister and the Belfast Trust for the information that they have got out to elected representatives and the community over the past days.

Like the Member who spoke previously, I have sympathy for the parents and the families of those who have been affected but also for the staff of the hospital, because they are directly affected too. Minister, you mentioned expectant mothers. I think that there is a need to continue that positive work with expectant mothers, because I have spoken to a number of them in the past few days, and they are genuinely afraid to attend the hospital, either because of a lack of information or because of misinformation.

In the media over the weekend there was a suggestion that the large turnover of cots could play a part in the problem. If that is wrong information, it would be useful and important to get the right information out there, so that we stay away from all of the rumours.

Mr Poots: Cots do not tend to have a quick turnover in the neonatal unit, because children tend to need the type of care that they get there for at least a number of weeks or, in many instances, for months. The turnover of cots in the neonatal unit is not potentially the problem. We have identified a number of potential problems, and we will get a report back tomorrow, all being well, on the potential for it to have come from a water source problem. That has been the case with other outbreaks of pseudomonas elsewhere. That is currently being investigated, so we cannot suggest at this stage that that is the cause of the problem, but it is certainly one of the areas that are being investigated.

Being a micro-organism, it can live even in very clean environments. Obviously the issue of hand hygiene is absolutely critical, not just for staff but for people who are visiting those facilities. I urge people, whatever hospital facility they are visiting, to use best practice as set out by the hospitals, because we need to ensure that hospital-acquired infections are reduced. It can often be members of the public who introduce those infections to the facilities. In relation to this particular facility, we will continue to identify where the problem has come from, and, hopefully, we will get to the nub of it in the not-too-distant future.

Mr McCallister: I welcome the Minister's response and thank Mr Wells for tabling the question. I want to associate myself and my party with the Minister's words of sympathy to the families. Few things in life are more emotive or distressing than the death of a child, particularly a young baby. It is a truly awful chapter for the hospitals and those families involved. They should be assured of our thoughts and prayers as they face the future.

I want to ask the Minister about the ward. When was it last subject to an Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) inspection? Does he have any concerns about the fact that there was a two-week interval between the first death and the ordering of the full deep clean?

Mr Poots: I will be making a full statement tomorrow, when I will deal with the issue of the RQIA, and I will be able to give the Member greater clarity on the time that elapsed between the first death and the instruction for a deep clean. One death does not constitute an outbreak. It was not until the second death happened that it constituted an outbreak. Although a baby lost its life in Altnagelvin in December, that particular strain of pseudomonas appears to be wholly different from the strain that caused the first death in Belfast. Indeed, it appears that not all of the strains in Belfast are identical. It is a very complicated micro-organism. It is difficult to get concise and precise answers for every question at this stage because it is all developing.

What is important is that, at this stage, we have dealt with all of the children in the unit to identify whether the problem exists with a number of children. We have been able to discover that no babies are currently infected by pseudomonas but that we currently have a number of babies who are carriers. That does not pose a particular threat, but, nonetheless, those babies are all being treated with antibiotics, and that is the right thing to do. We will give further details on some of those issues in the statement tomorrow.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for his answers, and I commend him on his handling of this very sensitive issue. I also take the opportunity to extend our very deepest sympathy to the families who have lost babies and to offer our ongoing support to them and to staff in neonatal care across the North. What is the capacity, in units and bed numbers, for neonatal care in Northern Ireland? In the aftermath of this awful series of incidents, does the Minister believe that that capacity is sufficient? How many babies and families have had to be sent for care outside the jurisdiction?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for his kind remarks: I am just attempting to deal with it as best I can. Thankfully, we are working with very good staff. I take this opportunity to commend the staff in the unit on the work that they have done. It has been a very difficult time, but they have sought to get on top of the problem and to provide parents with adequate assurances. I believe that there is now greater confidence in the facility among parents and staff, and that is good.

We have 105 neonatal cots available across Northern Ireland, which would normally be more than sufficient. Even at this point, not all facilities are being fully utilised. However, three different levels of care are provided in

neonatal units, and some of them are at maximum capacity. I understand that we have taken up the offer of care provision outside this jurisdiction in a couple of instances. Although we will seek to avoid that, we will also seek to ensure that mothers will give birth in facilities in which they have full confidence. We want to get the neonatal unit back to the point at which it can operate at full capacity. Many babies are being treated in it in a very safe way at this stage, and I trust that that will continue.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for his update on this very traumatic and sad occurrence. The Alliance Party joins him in offering its total sympathy to the families who have suffered enormously. I think that the Minister said that this bacterium has not been in Northern Ireland until now. Is he satisfied that the board and the Department were prepared for such an emergency?

Mr Poots: I have to correct the Member: I have not, at any point, said that this bacterium has not been in Northern Ireland before. The bacterium is very prevalent; it is probably in the Chamber and being carried by many of us. As I indicated, it is a micro-organism. It thrives in damp environments, and Northern Ireland is a very damp country. The bacterium thrives in water and in soil.

The bacterium is very prevalent but has no impact on people whose immune systems are normal. However, it can have a very devastating impact on people with very low immune systems. Obviously, the babies in the neonatal unit have little immunity with which to fight these infections, and therein lies the problem. This bacterium will almost certainly be in other hospitals across Northern Ireland. That is not a reason to panic, because it will have little or no impact on those facilities. It will have an impact on people with very low immune systems. We have to do our utmost to ensure that those people are adequately protected and cared for. We have had a problem at the Royal Jubilee Maternity Service. We have had an outbreak which sadly and very tragically led to the loss of life. We are doing our utmost to ensure that there is no further loss of life, and we are hopeful that that will be the case. I hope to be at a stage in the near future where I can move beyond being hopeful to being confident that that is the case.

3.45 pm

Mr Speaker: No other parties have indicated that they want to ask the Minister a supplementary question. There will be a further opportunity to ask questions tomorrow, when the Minister will bring a fuller statement to the House. Let us move on.

Private Members' Business

Schools: Pupils Living in Poverty

Debate resumed on amendment to motion:

> *That this Assembly notes that one child in four is living in poverty; calls on the Minister of Education, with support from the Executive, to target extra resources at pupils living in poverty to enable them to succeed at school; and further calls on the Minister to ensure that schools are accountable for using their funding to help children who are living in poverty to realise their full potential. — [Mr Flanagan.]*

Which amendment was:

Leave out all after the first "poverty;" and insert

> *"further notes that early offers of family help and support can improve health and educational outcomes, reduce youth offending and increase lifetime opportunities; calls on the Minister of Education, the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, with support from the Executive, to target extra resources at pupils living in poverty to enable them to succeed at school; and further calls on the Minister of Education to ensure that schools are accountable for using their funding to help children who are living in poverty to realise their full potential." — [Mr McNarry.]*

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I want to take you back to the beginning of Question Time, with questions to the deputy First Minister. You will recall that the first question was from Mr Lynch. The reason I draw attention to that fact is that Standing Order 20(7) indicates: "the first question may not be from a member of the same party as the Minister to whom it is addressed".

We all knew that it was the turn of the deputy First Minister to answer questions for OFMDFM today. I am therefore surprised that the first question was from a Member of that Minister's party, given the content of Standing Order 20(7) and given that the knowledge was that questions would be to the deputy First Minister. Will you cast some light on that?

Mr Speaker: I certainly will. I remind the Member that questions to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister are to the office, not to the First Minister or deputy First Minister as individuals. That, therefore, was quite in order. I hear what the Member is saying, but that was quite in order. I have reminded the House in the past that questions to the First Minister and the deputy First Minister are, as I say, to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

We will now return to the debate on pupils living in poverty. I call Michelle McIlveen.

Miss M McIlveen: I support the amendment and concur with many of the remarks made by previous Members. Like the Chairman of the Committee, I am disappointed by the tone of the Member who moved the motion. He used this very serious issue as a ruse to raise the subject of academic selection incorrectly and, might I say, inappropriately. What bothers me most about that is that it distracts from what could and should have been the core of the motion, namely

that poverty is a very real and genuine issue in society and one which we all have a duty to address.

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

The latest figures show a 3% increase in the number of children experiencing poverty this year compared with last year. Much has already been said about the reduction in funding to schools, the disparity in funding to primary schools, and the need to target funding at schools in disadvantaged areas and at nursery provision. There is a real need to assist families who find themselves, often through no fault of their own, in poverty.

In preparation for this debate I wanted, rather than duplicating what has been said, to look particularly at the need to assist parents in poverty and children in care. The most recent studies have shown clearly that poverty most strongly affects children's education and cognitive outcomes, even more than health or behavioural outcomes. It is on education achievement that poverty has the most impact. Perhaps even more importantly, the studies show clearly that parental qualifications, particularly those of the mother, are the most powerful predictor of a child's education outcome. Of all the factors that influence intergenerational poverty, poor education achievement is the most significant. Unless we turn around the education outcomes for poorer children, they will stay poor and will most likely pass that experience of poverty on to their children.

The Child Poverty Action Group advises that that trend is becoming more ingrained among children and young people who have experienced poverty over the past two decades. As a result, they are much less likely to move into well-paid employment and, therefore, they will suffer greater effects from poverty well into adulthood. Those points were made by Mr McNarry. The chances for today's children and young people to move out of poverty in adulthood are lower than they were for those born 50 years ago; that is quite stark. To change outcomes for children living in poverty and to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty, we must do more to ensure their education outcomes.

A key element in improving attainment in education for those children and, therefore, their life chances is to provide the kind of early parental help and support that will make a difference. That must mean offering help to parents during pregnancy and enabling them to understand how their earliest interaction with their babies can affect their life chances. That really brings it out of the remit of the Department of Education and makes it an Executive issue.

A range of research has shown a direct connection between the number of books in a household and how well children do educationally. If parents have not had a great experience at school, they will not have received early support themselves. That support must be given to them to show them how to interact with their child in a way that supports early learning. It is critical that there are policies and programmes that support library use, for example, and reading to children at home to improve outcomes.

Wearing another hat, I emphasise the importance of libraries, particularly in disadvantaged areas, and outreach programmes that will really engage parents who may not otherwise use them or have access to books. The role of local libraries in our communities must be developed and grown.

I have spoken many times on issues of concern around looked-after children. Although we have seen some small improvement by way of better outcomes, they remain one of the most vulnerable groups of children and are more significantly at risk of poverty than almost any other child. In 2009-2010, 17% of children who left care achieved more than five GCSEs at grades A to C compared with 70% of school leavers in general, while 43% of all children who left care had no qualifications at all, compared with only 2·1% of school leavers in general.

Poor education outcomes for children and young people in care are directly linked to higher levels and intergenerational patterns of poverty, so it is essential that we look at creating new sources of funding to support better education programmes. Those programmes already in place, such as Fostering Achievement, the Letterbox Club and the new personal education plans, must be built on to ensure that we make better use of the resources that we have for that most disadvantaged group of children.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close, please.

Miss M McIlveen: I look forward to seeing some definitive policies and funding coming forward to make some real change.

Ms Ruane: Ar dtús, cuirim fáilte roimh an rún seo. Ceapaim go bhfuil sé an-tábhachtach go bhfuil muid ag plé leis an ábhar agus go bhfuil ról le himirt ag gach duine sa sochaí.

I welcome the fact that we are debating the motion. We have to deal with these important issues and ensure that every person plays his or her role. We have heard the statistics. Sinn Féin believes that the most effective way to eradicate poverty and to deal with disadvantage is to target on the basis of need. No one should be under any doubt that access to excellence in education, whether preschool, primary school or post-primary school, is the way forward. Access to a broad-based curriculum that puts the child rather than the institutions at the centre is the way forward.

It is even more important that money is invested wisely and fairly when resources are scarce and that we use it to stamp out the deep inequalities in our system. Sinn Féin has held the Education portfolio since 1998, and Martin McGuinness, John O'Dowd and I are proud of the role we have played in bringing about badly needed changes to the system to ensure that young people get the education and qualifications they deserve and need to progress. However, no one is complacent. We have a lot of work to do.

The fact that the percentage of young people getting five GCSEs is increasing and that the Programme for Government aims to continue that trend must be welcomed, as must the fact that the percentage of children getting a preschool year is increasing and is now in the high 90s. I welcome the Minister's pledge to increase that further. A few short years ago, the statistics showed that figure to be only 43%, and I think that, rather than people being selective in what they quote — I refer to Conall McDevitt's comments — they should give credit where credit is due. I welcome the fact that all parties now accept that, although we have excellence in our system, major parts of it need to improve. Even that more mature debate is to be welcomed.

I welcome the fact that Michelle McIlveen mentioned libraries. I absolutely agree with her. Access to technology

and computers is almost more important than libraries, and I welcome the fact that the Department has rolled out over 30,000 computers into primary schools. Equality in technology will be important for children and young people.

In the South of Ireland, Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) schools operate in disadvantaged areas and currently get additional resources and teachers. The current Minister of Education moved to reduce some of that, but, thankfully, because Sinn Féin tabled a private Members' debate in Leinster House in which it pointed out the importance of continuing with DEIS, we hope those schools will continue to get funding. I mention that because we can learn a lot from what is happening in the South in relation to the DEIS schools, as, indeed, schools and the Administration in the South can learn from us.

I welcome the fact that the North/South Ministerial Council continues to focus on standards and underachievement. I urge the Minister to intensify that focus, and I know he will. We should be learning from countries at the top of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) tables, for example Finland, and also Poland, where performance has shot up. That is good to see. We need to learn from those countries and what they are doing.

One thing we know is that selection at a very young age entrenches disadvantage and poverty. I call on the schools that continue to discriminate against children to reconsider their approach. I call on all schools to implement the Department's proposals in relation to transfer, and I support absolutely what Phil Flanagan said. We have heard research on early years cited, but sometimes people refuse to acknowledge the research done at a very high level, including by the United Nations, on the link between selection and underachievement. That is well documented, and Members would do well not to ignore it.

We need all our young people to leave school with good qualifications and literacy and numeracy skills. We want them to be active, stimulated citizens with a lifelong-learning approach. Some 30% of learning is done in school and 70% in community and families. We need to target our resources very strategically, and I have no doubt that the Minister will continue to do that.

Mr Craig: I share my colleagues' bewilderment with the original motion and the way it was presented to the House. I say "bewilderment" because if I had introduced that motion, the Minister could have understood the reason for my doing it — I would have been questioning his competence and role. I find it intriguing that the former Minister of Education has stepped forward to the Minister's defence. The whole situation is rather intriguing.

However, I support the amendment and the motion. This is a very serious issue. I have found something upon which I can agree with the former Minister: this is not solely the role of the Department of Education. Responsibility for it cuts across the Executive, and many Departments can contribute to it. The obvious one, already highlighted, is the Department of Health. It has a major role to play with regard to the whole issue. There are also the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and the Department for Social Development (DSD), which are two major contributors to tackling this whole issue not only of poverty in our communities but also underachievement in those areas of our community that are affected by poverty.

I refer to what the Health Department has done on the issue. In my hand, I have a consultation document entitled 'Improving Outcomes for Children and Young People and their Families', which was produced by the South Eastern Outcomes Group. The reason I refer to it is simple: this is where I take issue with the Department. A very worthwhile organisation, the Resurgent Community Development Trust, formally the Old Warren Partnership, works in my constituency with local community groups, schools and others in the community to try to tackle the issues that are causing not only the poverty but the underachievement.

I found that disappointing because, although the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has stepped up to the mark and is putting money into such projects, I was astonished to discover that the Department of Education had done little or nothing to support them.

4.00 pm

Mr McCarthy: I felt a bit aggrieved when the Member said that the Health Department had stepped in. Do you not concede that the Health Department, under your party's Ministry, has significantly failed to contribute to the continuation of the excellent work of Home-Start throughout Northern Ireland? That organisation works on a shoestring and, in some cases, is almost going under because the Health Department did not subscribe to it.

Mr Craig: I recommend that the Member take that up with the Minister. I will not get into an argument or debate about what funding goes to which areas. What struck me was not where the funding was going but that Departments were not tying their efforts together to tackle the issue. I am sure that the Minister will agree with me that the major contributors to improving standards in education must be the Department of Education and the schools themselves. I found it bewildering that I and other politicians in the area had to use our influence with schools to get them involved in such a project. I appeal to the Minister to work in a joined-up way with the Health Department, DSD and other Departments in tackling the issue. I hope that the Minister will take that on board.

The motion refers to targeting resources to enable pupils living in poverty to succeed. I totally agree. We will have to lend support to the parents and families of children who are obvious underachievers. We are all aware of the social groups from which they come: lone parents, vulnerable parents and so on. The Minister is aware of a list of factors, such as background, that are clear indicators of where underachievement will come from. So far, the Minister and the Department have used free school meals to target resources at those groups, but I want to add a word of caution. As chairman of a board of governors, I see more and more underachievement not only among those in receipt of social income and benefits such as free school meals but among the working poor. Increasingly, the children of parents who both work but, quite frankly, get the minimum wage, are underachieving.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close, please.

Mr Craig: If the Minister is to tackle the issue, I appeal to him to look at a wider and more beneficial way of targeting individuals.

Mrs Dobson: I support the motion and thank those who brought it to the House today. I also support my party's amendment, which seeks to promote a co-ordinated and joined-up approach to tackling the issue of pupils living in poverty across Northern Ireland and, indeed, to breaking the cycle of poverty for future generations. Any business looking to tackle an issue will constructively review what it has already done, and the Executive should be no different. In my Upper Bann constituency, the Department for Social Development funds projects in the neighbourhood renewal areas of Portadown, Lurgan and Brownlow. That work is specifically targeted at those identified as being in greatest social need.

As Members will be aware, the 'Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2010' was published in May of that year. In that, which is the latest report, electoral wards statistically experiencing the highest levels of deprivation are categorised as neighbourhood renewal areas and qualify for special funding administered by DSD. The multiple measures by which the report identifies deprivation include household income and educational attainment. Neighbourhood partnerships operate in 10% of the most deprived neighbourhoods across Northern Ireland and comprise a number of statutory bodies and other service providers, including representatives from DSD, the local health and social care trusts, councils, the Housing Executive, education and library boards and regional colleges. Residents from those areas are represented through community associations. Importantly, all the initiatives to tackle the renewal of those neighbourhoods are being taken forward through everyone working in partnership. Pupils living in Craigavon, in my constituency, are benefiting directly through a number of initiatives offered by links between Southern Regional College (SRC) and local primary schools.

In one instance, SRC was able to provide learning support in the form of mentors, who have been working alongside tutors within CCEA occupational studies classes. This project was entitled "improving the chances of young people" and its purpose was to provide additional academic and practical support through the use of mentors. The mentors offered pupils living in neighbourhood renewal areas the opportunity to improve their life chances through education. The outcomes of this project show a significant increase in level 2 attainments, with a steady and continuous improvement in pupils' grades. Passes at this level are equivalent to GCSE grades A* to C, so the high percentage of passes falling into these grades greatly enhances the future prospects of the young people who take part in this project.

Raising educational attainment by breaking down barriers to learning is one of the key ways in which we can tackle the issue of young people living in poverty; indeed, that is how we are tackling it already. I am aware that this is one example, but there will be many more examples from across Northern Ireland of how working effectively in partnership can ensure that not only is the best outcome achievable from the funding available, but the work of statutory bodies and government agencies is not duplicated or expensively overlapped.

Through our amendment, the Ulster Unionist Party is calling for a similar partnership approach from this Executive to ensure that funding is effectively targeted to achieve the best outcome for those in the greatest need. Only through a co-ordinated interdepartmental approach involving the lessons learned from best practice, which does exist in this area, can we be sure that we are helping children living in poverty to realise their full potential and, at the same time, breaking the cycle of poverty for future generations.

Detailed evaluation reports are compiled at the end of each neighbourhood renewal project and, if we are to learn the valuable lessons that they can teach us from the funding that we have already targeted at tackling deprivation, they should be part of any Executive initiatives to combat the issue of pupils living in poverty. I support the motion and my party's amendment.

Mr Eastwood: My constituency of Foyle is one of two areas here with the highest rates of child deprivation on these islands; the other is West Belfast. According to Barnardo's, the percentage of children living in workless households in the North has gone from 13% to 17%. That is a higher figure than anywhere in GB. It is clear that the problem of child poverty here is getting worse, not better. It is also clear that the current and impending cuts being implemented here could lead to an economic and social disaster for our society.

I support the motion, as it aims to target what limited resources we have at helping the poorest children in our society to achieve their full potential in education. It is also essential that OFMDFM outlines additional measures to tackle the scourge of child poverty. The Westminster Government have set a target of 2020 for the elimination of child poverty. It is hard to imagine that these targets can be achieved, given their current austerity measures and policies. But it is clear that OFMDFM needs to outline its own independent target for the eradication of child poverty, separate from that at Westminster. Research conducted by the Institute for Fiscal Studies demonstrates that Westminster is set to miss its target on child poverty. It is, therefore, essential that this Executive and this Assembly set their own individual target and priority for the elimination of child poverty.

We often talk about the need for all Departments to be Departments of the economy, by promoting it. In my view, and in line with the amendment, all Departments, including the Department of Education and OFMDFM, should be focused on eradicating child poverty.

Mr Agnew: I support the motion and the amendment. I particularly welcome the amendment because it draws to our attention the cross-departmental nature of child and pupil poverty, and that is key to the debate.

If we are to tackle disadvantage in our communities, we must invest in early years provision. The motion calls for more resources to be put into tackling pupil poverty, and I certainly support that call. However, as well as extra resources, we need to make better use of the resources that we have. I am working on a private Member's Bill, and I have written to the Minister about the issue, calling for a statutory duty on Departments to collaborate on the planning, commissioning and delivery of children's services. The lack of a statutory duty has meant that funding streams are not being sufficiently consolidated and that our strategies to tackle child poverty have lacked co-ordination. In short, Departments and Ministers are talking to one

another, but they are not yet working together to address this important issue.

In fact, I do not think that there is an incentive for them to work together. What usually happens when a Department tries to work with another Department is that there is a wrangling over funding and who will put what resources where. However, if Departments were to pool their budgets, there would be an incentive. Let us take as an example the Justice Minister, who answered questions at Question Time today. It is in his interests that we put money into early years, because it is his Department that will see the benefit, but what will the benefit be for the Health Minister, who will have to tackle that issue? If both Departments worked together and pooled their resources, each could have the resources necessary to ensure that its own policy objectives are met.

The early years strategy is key to the debate. It has been pointed out by the National Association of Head Teachers Northern Ireland that there is scant reference to Sure Start in the early years strategy and that nought-to-three provision has barely been addressed. Again, that comes back to the lack of collaborative working between Departments. In defence of the Department of Education, where the strategy currently sits, I must point out that its responsibility does not generally kick in until a child reaches the age of three, so it has, understandably, focused on ages three to six as opposed to nought to three. That is why that strategy should never have been given to a single Department; it should be cross-departmental and include the Health Department, which has responsibility for ages nought to three.

Sure Start funding and provision in Northern Ireland falls short of that in other regions of the UK, yet it is one model that I think everyone in the House would agree has produced positive outcomes, and outcomes are precisely what we should focus on in this debate. Of course we are all against pupil poverty, but, ultimately, we need strategies and interventions that will reduce pupil poverty, and Sure Start has been shown to be an effective way of doing that. In fact, Professor Heckman, whose research has been promoted on a number of occasions in the House, has shown how spending £1 on early years could save us up to £7 in future intervention costs.

My fear is that the Executive's approach to the economy will only increase poverty and economic inequality. That fear was not allayed when I asked the Finance Minister what is being done to tackle inequality. He chose to lambaste my party and its policies rather than speak directly on the issue. Unfortunately, it is assumed that in prioritising the economy we will also tackle poverty, but evidence shows that that is not always the case. You can have economic growth without improving outcomes for people, particularly those on the lowest incomes and those in poverty.

I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

4.15 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close, please.

Mr Agnew: I hope that he indicates how he will be working with his ministerial colleagues to tackle this issue.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Fáiltím roimh an deis freagairt don rún. Tá mé i ndiaidh éisteacht go cúramach leis an díospóireacht, agus beidh mé ag freagairt d'oiread de na ceisteanna a cuireadh agus is féidir.

I welcome the opportunity to respond to the motion. I have listened carefully to the debate, and I shall respond to as many of the issues raised as possible.

It is well known that living in poverty can result in the restricted development of a child's cognitive ability, poor nutrition and lack of educational qualifications. However, that should not determine a child's future. Although those are the conditions in which a child grows up, and we should not ignore them, we should not use them as an excuse for the future of a child's educational development.

It is widely accepted that education is fundamentally important in preparing people for work and improving their life chances. Statistics show that, in percentage terms, children from the most income-deprived areas perform less well than others. Recognition of the importance of addressing and improving education achievement will shape the Department of Education's contribution to the forthcoming child poverty action plan. However, the impact of improved education standards on reducing child poverty will only become clear in future years.

I have embarked on a programme of significant education reform on raising standards, improving education outcomes for all children, promoting equality of opportunity and supporting young people in their learning. I have published long-term targets to 2020 for improving education outcomes achieved by pupils. Those targets relate to the Department's overarching priorities of raising standards and reducing underachievement and provide a clear basis for measurement.

When I made my statement in this Chamber in September, I said that my clear priority was to create an education service that will ensure that all our young people receive a high-quality education that enriches their lives and grows the economy. I want every child to leave their time in education valuing themselves and those around them, which in turn will make them valued and valuable members of our society. That must include young people who are living in poverty.

The draft Programme for Government recognises the particular contribution that education can make to tackling disadvantage and poverty. It includes targets around increasing the proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who achieve at least five GCSEs at grades A* to C grades or equivalent, including Maths and English.

Mr Byrne: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: Let me get into the flow of my response.

There are also targets to improve literacy and numeracy levels among all school leavers. It is important that children living in poverty are given the earliest opportunity to start learning. I recognise the importance of early education and early intervention.

The Sure Start programme provides support to parents and children from birth to age four in designated areas of disadvantage across the North. It provides one year of quality preschool education to all children whose parents wish to avail themselves of a place. Last week, I announced that we will be providing one year of quality free preschool

education to all children whose parents wish to avail themselves of a place. This year, there are 23,000 in preschool settings, and, although it is a non-compulsory phase of education, we know that parents value it highly.

Last week, I also announced in the Assembly the outcome of the review of preschool admissions. That will introduce changes to improve the system for children and parents and will impact on policy and practice. It takes into particular consideration those families living on low incomes, whether they are working or on benefits. My Department also funds a number of key initiatives and signature projects which are targeted at income-deprived communities.

I will now take the Member's intervention.

Mr Byrne: Are there any proposals to help children from Traveller families, who often suffer unduly from poverty? Quite often, children live on halting sites or permanent sites that do not have great resources when it comes to education provision.

Mr O'Dowd: On that very point, only a matter of weeks ago, I launched the Travellers report, which was commissioned by my predecessor and sets out a number of recommendations and action points. My Department is studying how to take forward those recommendations and action points. There are also additional resources available to schools that have children from the Travelling community. So we are trying our utmost, and we intend to improve our services to the Travelling community.

Among other key initiatives and signature projects targeted at income-deprived families is free school meals. Research has shown that there is a strong link between nutrition and learning and behaviour. My predecessor extended the free school meals criteria in 2010-11 to include nursery and primary-school pupils in low-income families. On Mr Craig's point, that includes low-income families who are working. The extension has resulted in around 13,000 additional children receiving a nutritionally balanced meal once a day. The Department has made available additional resources of over £4 million to the education and library boards this financial year to fund that extension.

In addition, the Department introduced the primary-school uniform grant in 2009-2010, specifically to help reduce the spiralling cost of uniforms faced by some parents. Around £3·8 million of grants will be paid to parents in 2011-12 to assist with primary-school and post-primary-school uniform costs.

Another important initiative is the extended schools programme, to which I have made £10 million available this year and for each of the next three years. The extended schools money has been ring-fenced, despite the difficult financial pressures bearing down on the Department of Education. My predecessor and I made a conscious decision to ring-fence extended schools money, which is beneficial to schools and communities in socially deprived areas. The policy enables those schools that draw pupils from some of the most disadvantaged communities to provide a range of services and programmes outside the traditional school day to help meet the needs of pupils, their families and the wider community. The programme has a clear focus on improving education outcomes, reducing barriers to learning and providing additional support to help improve the life chances of disadvantaged children and young people.

We continue to support two full-service pilot programmes, through the Belfast Education and Library Board and the CCMS, as part of our continuing efforts to address the needs of disadvantaged communities and narrow the gap in achievement levels. That provision is currently in place in two areas that suffer from the highest level of socio-economic deprivation: full-service schools are based at the Boys' Model School and the Model School for Girls in north Belfast, and a full-service community network is based in Ballymurphy. I have provided funding of £350,000 this year and, budgets permitting and with evaluated results, hope to extend that funding until March 2015.

I am committed to ensuring that the schools estate, which represents a significant public resource, is used more widely to serve the needs of pupils, their parents, families and the local community. That point was touched on by Mr Flanagan. Many schools already open their premises outside normal school hours for use by the community. However, I want to see more schools open and being responsive to community needs. My Department is considering the best way forward, having taken into account a working group report on the issue.

My Department invests approximately £35 million annually in youth work delivered or supported through the education and library boards and the Youth Council. Without effective intervention, the outcomes for some young people are poorer compared with those for their peers. Although relevant to all young people, youth provision can be particularly relevant to those young people who are disadvantaged or feel marginalised because of the effects of poverty. That highlights the need for youth work funded by the education sector to have a clearer focus on its contributions to improving education standards and tackling disadvantage, a point made by Mr McNarry in reference to a number of studies in the United States of America. We cherish and recognise the role of youth work in education. As a result, my Department is in the process of developing a new policy for the Youth Service — Priorities for Youth — which will issue for public consultation later this year. Targeting disadvantage and assessing need will be a key focus of the policy.

I recently commenced legislation on the entitlement framework to give schools the flexibility to offer a pupil-centric curriculum. The framework seeks to provide equality of access to young people facing barriers to learning and disadvantage.

All that I have said until now relates to programmes and initiatives funded by the Department and the education and library boards. Although those programmes are vital to addressing socio-economic deprivation and giving young people from socio-economically deprived areas a chance, the day-to-day running of our schools is key to education achievement and to tackling social deprivation. A number of Members mentioned that. We are also working there. A significant part of the Department's overall budget is delegated to schools through the common funding formula. A social deprivation element of that funding seeks to reflect the additional cost for schools in educating socially disadvantaged children regardless of ability and the particular challenges facing schools with a high proportion of children from such backgrounds.

Budgets distributed to schools in the current financial year include an additional £28·1 million of funding to reflect

social deprivation need, with an overall targeted social need factor of almost £52·4 million. In relation to accountability for the way in which that money is spent, schools are accountable to parents for the outcomes they achieve for their pupils. The education and library boards and CCMS are accountable to my Department for the standards achieved by schools in their area. Also, my Department inspects the quality of provision in all our schools. I also announced as part of my autumn statement to the Assembly on 26 September that I have initiated a review of the current funding arrangements to ensure that they fully take account of social deprivation and support a more sustainable schools estate. The establishment of the Education and Skills Authority will provide a basis for taking forward work on tackling poverty on a regional basis.

Mr D Bradley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I have a quite substantial piece of information to go through, so I will continue.

I now turn to the amendment that was tabled by the Ulster Unionist Party. I sought views from colleagues in the two Departments concerned, and I am aware that they, along with my Department, are considering their respective contributions to the overall strategy for reducing child poverty. I am sure that they, like me, would appreciate extra resources to enable them to do more in this important area. In addition to the two Departments identified, other Departments, such as the Department for Social Development, have a major role to play in alleviating poverty.

Minister Ford assured me that the Department of Justice's actions in areas such as community safety, reducing offending and the rehabilitation and resettlement of offenders will contribute in one way or another to reducing child poverty. Such actions are, in the main, complementary to other, more direct, government initiatives that specifically address child poverty.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety leads on the development of a number of public health strategies that seek to improve the health and well-being of the population and reduce inequalities in health. Those strategies seek to improve health outcomes for the entire population. However, they also target groups that are particularly at risk or vulnerable, including those who live in areas of deprivation.

I will now turn to some of the points made by Members. By and large, people agree with the thrust of the motion and the amendment. I say this to Mr Craig: I have no difficulty with my party or any other party challenging me in the Assembly or, indeed, outside the Assembly. My work and competence are open to question regardless of where the Back-Benchers may come from. I have no difficulty with that whatsoever.

With regard to Mervyn Storey's reaction to Mr Flanagan's comments on grammar schools, it bewilders me why the Chair of the Education Committee refuses to question the role of grammar schools in this matter. The evidence is there to be seen. That evidence may not draw you away from the point of view that academic selection should be withdrawn or remain. However, the evidence is clear: the majority of our grammar schools do not have pupils from socially deprived communities. We have to ask why and how we rectify that. You cannot ignore the evidence in front of you, nor should a debate such as this ignore the evidence.

My Department's refusal to fund a project in Mr Storey's constituency is more of a constituency issue than a broader issue. He claimed that it would cost the Department nothing. He was absolutely correct, but it would have cost DSD a considerable amount. We are both accountable for our public spends and taxpayers' money, and, in the view of the Department, which I agreed with, it would not have brought additional learning to the community. It was only a replication of the work that schools carry out on a daily basis.

Mr McDevitt spoke of schools he visited and the pressure bearing down on schools. I do not doubt for one moment that there is pressure bearing down on schools. I hope that the additional money secured through the collective work of the Executive in recent days and weeks will help to alleviate that pressure. I am continuing to work with my Executive colleagues to secure a budget for the Department of Education that will allow schools to expand rather than retract their education delivery. However, warm sentiments for schools facing difficulties will not buy one extra schoolbook or jotter. What we need are plans and strategies for the way forward.

The Department of Education and the Executive have delivered in that regard. We have more to do, but sympathy will not buy any resources for any school. It is as simple as that.

Michelle McIlveen made a point about children in care. You will be aware that, last Thursday, the Health Minister and I —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close, please.

4.30 pm

Mr O'Dowd: — launched a new strategy for personal education plans for children in care. That is a new way forward for children in care, but we should not be complacent. That progress will continue to be monitored. I welcome the motion and the amendment, and I support both.

Mr Beggs: I welcome the wide acceptance that there has been for the amendment in the name of David McNarry, Jo-Anne Dobson and me. It was designed to highlight the complexity of the issue of child poverty, the complexity of the causes of it and the complexity of trying to solve it.

I was most disappointed by the approach taken by the proposer of the motion. He seemed to prioritise three issues to address child poverty: close the grammar schools, increase free school meals and increase the uniform grant. Those issues need to be addressed, but we need to make sure that we prioritise our funding and invest wisely to produce the best outcomes for our children.

I was amazed that absenteeism was rarely mentioned. Third World countries appreciate the importance of education in enabling people to move out of poverty, and that equally applies here. My family have valued their education because it allowed previous generations to better themselves. A statistic from the former Department for Children, Schools and Families shows that 8% of truants can expect to get five GCSEs or more. What are we doing to address truancy and the high levels of absenteeism? If someone is not regularly at school, they will fall behind and are less likely to reach their full attainment, get qualified and get a job. If they do

not attend school regularly, they are less likely to attend a workplace regularly and less likely to be employed. They are most likely to end up NEET. The very sad thing is that 40% of those who are currently categorised as NEET will be parents within 10 years. So, guess what? The cycle will continue. We must think carefully about how we can break the cycle.

I draw Members' attention to the questions for written answer that I submitted on this matter: AQW 705/11-15, AQW 706/11-15 and AQW 707/11-15. One of the responses shows that average absenteeism in Northern Ireland primary schools is 55 per 1,000 with less than 85% attendance. When you look at the disadvantaged areas, what do you find? In the Antiville ward in my constituency, the figure is 115 per 1,000. In the Blackcave ward in Larne, it is 94 per 1,000. The figures for the two disadvantaged wards in Carrickfergus are, I think, 136 per 1,000 and 163 per 1,000. In the proposer's constituency, the figure for Devenish in Fermanagh is 221 per 1,000. Almost 20% of kids are not at school regularly. Let us address that issue effectively. That is why Departments need to co-operate, which is the purpose behind the amendment. It is about early intervention, family support programmes and Sure Start. I declare an interest as a member of a Sure Start committee.

With regard to health, a multiagency support team works in schools in the North Eastern Board area. Similar teams may have different titles elsewhere. The team looks at complex issues that prevent children excelling at school. Those might be speech and language issues or behavioural problems. The team moves in when there are a multitude of issues. Currently, only half of the schools in Carrickfergus are on the scheme, because there is no money. Only one of the 16 schools in Larne, if my numbers are right, is on the scheme. The lack of funds prevents others joining it. The Minister, in answer to a recent question, indicated that the scheme achieves very positive results.

The northern area early intervention project works with children aged eight to 13 who are at risk of offending. It has very positive outcomes. Another programme is provided by Action for Children and is called the Choices Family Support Programme, which is for 10- to 17-year-olds. It also involves the Department of Justice. The funding has been moved to a pay-as-you-go scheme. Guess what? It is difficult to recruit anybody because it is a pay-as-you-go job. The Assembly needs to look carefully at how it makes that type of preventative investment and, if there is money to invest, identify the best area in which to put it.

I want to discuss quickly some comments that other Members made. Mr Storey accused the proposer of the motion of trying to deflect difficulty away from the Minister. Conall McDevitt pointed out that speech and language therapy and counselling has been reduced. Trevor Lunn supported the idea that early years are important and that OFMDFM should have involvement in the matter. A number of Members agreed that, if the Assembly wants to break the cycle of poverty, that requires collective working between Departments to address the long-term causes of poverty rather than short-term superficial issues.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the proposer of the motion, Mr Flanagan, who opened the debate by saying that selection discriminates against children and can prevent them reaching their full potential, particularly in areas of social disadvantage. I stand over that argument, as does my party.

Mr Flanagan discussed EMA and the suggestion that schools should review their policies on school trips. Having spoken to many parents in my area, I know that that is an issue. Many parents in socially disadvantaged areas find it difficult to tell their children that they cannot go on school trips because they cannot afford them, while their children's friends go because their parents can. That causes wide disparity among young people. Mr Flanagan also talked about the disengagement of boys in particular from school at 10 years of age. That has been reflected throughout the debate.

Mr McNarry spoke to the issues confronted by the motion and the amendment. Issues start in the home owing to the realities and extent of the poverty that exists. Mr McNarry also mentioned the links between crime, truancy and chronic absenteeism. There is a risk that young people who are out of school will get involved in crime. There is a direct correlation between drug and alcohol addiction and young people's absence from school; I know from speaking to school principals about the number of young people who are caught with drugs and alcohol in school. How to deal with that is another issue. Mr McNarry, in discussing current poverty levels, said that one child in five is in poverty. In 2010, in the North, 46,000 young adults between 16 and 24 years of age were not in education, employment or training (NEET). That figure is startling.

I want to discuss remarks made by the Chairperson of the Committee for Education, who is not present in the Chamber. He mentioned the funding disparity between primary and post-primary schools and the number of young people who leave post-primary education with limited reading and writing capabilities. He also got very excited in defence of grammar schools. I cannot understand that when quite a large number of young Protestants from working-class areas also leave post-primary education with limited reading capability.

Conall McDevitt spoke about the number of invitations that the Committee gets from schools. Every school wants to tell its story on regression, rightly so. He also mentioned schools where there are no longer school counsellors or homework clubs and a lack of speech and language therapists. The Committee had the opportunity to speak to different schools. That has been reflected in the debate.

Trevor Lunn mentioned child poverty and the complex problems that surround it. He said that it is not only a problem for schools but is to do with marginalised communities, poverty of aspiration and young people's limited quality of life.

How the Assembly tackles pathways to poverty also featured highly in the debate. Different organisations, such as Barnardo's, do good work and run projects and programmes on pathways out of poverty.

Miss McIlveen spoke about educational achievement and said that poverty has the biggest impact on educational achievement. She also spoke about support for parents and the interaction with the child in the early years. She said that the chances of children moving out of poverty are fewer now than they were a number of years ago. I disagree with that. A lot more has to be done, but I think that we have come a long way. She also spoke about how

libraries play an important role in areas of disadvantage. I reiterate that point. Libraries in most areas play an important part in children's education, and I know that from the library in my area of Strabane. A lot of children do not have broadband or computers at home, and they depend on libraries for broadband access and computers to get their homework or their theses done. Michelle McIlveen also spoke about looked-after children. I welcome the Minister's announcement of the launch of the new strategy for children in care.

Caitríona Ruane spoke of the access that we have here. We have an excellent education system, and it is about putting children at the heart of education, not the institution. She also spoke about what is happening in the South. My party put in a private Member's motion and debated the DEIS schools and ensuring continuation of funding. She said that we can learn a lot from what is happening in the South and other countries such as Finland.

Mrs Dobson spoke about DSD funding and the different projects in neighbourhood renewal areas and how they play a big part in areas of deprivation. Again, going back to my town of Strabane — NISRA ranks Strabane as very high in areas of multi-deprivation — I know that neighbourhood renewal does good projects there and funds different programmes in disadvantaged areas.

Colum Eastwood spoke rightly of the deprivation in Foyle and west Belfast and about the impending cuts that will have a devastating impact on families.

Steven Agnew particularly welcomed the amendment and spoke again on early intervention, as well as the extra resources that we need to use. I believe that we have opportunities that we can use. It is not just about the extra resources; it is about what we have at the minute and how the extra resources can support what we have.

I want to touch on some of the things that the Minister mentioned in his response. He spoke on the significant education reform in raising standards and improving educational outcomes to promote equality of opportunity. I welcome the targets that the Minister and his Department have set to improve literacy and numeracy among all school leavers. Early intervention programmes, such as Sure Start, provide support to parents of children aged nought to four in areas of social disadvantage right across the North. We have to commend Sure Start for the good work that it does in those areas, as well as Home-Start and other projects that are rolled out in communities.

The Minister also spoke about the key initiatives the Department is bringing forward which are targeted at income-deprived families. I welcome those initiatives and the fact that there is £350,000 extra funding this year. The hope to extend that until March 2015 has to be welcomed.

4.45 pm

There were various contributions to the debate, and it is widely acknowledged that the issue is not just a statutory obligation for the Department of Education; it is the responsibility of all Departments in the Assembly and the Executive. We are all responsible for ensuring that tackling poverty is of the utmost importance. I read an article in the 'Belfast Telegraph' last week by Ivan Little entitled "Suffer the Little Children", which showed me that we, as political representatives, have to do everything in our power to ensure that poverty is eradicated. I do not believe that the Westminster Government's target of 2020 is realistic. However, I know that we are committed to eradicating poverty here. My party is committed to that, and I am sure that there is consensus on that across the House.

Question, That the amendment be made, put and agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly notes that one child in four is living in poverty; further notes that early offers of family help and support can improve health and educational outcomes, reduce youth offending and increase lifetime opportunities; calls on the Minister of Education, the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, with support from the Executive, to target extra resources at pupils living in poverty to enable them to succeed at school; and further calls on the Minister of Education to ensure that schools are accountable for using their funding to help children who are living in poverty to realise their full potential.*

Irish Veterans of World War II

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes in which to propose the motion and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Weir: I beg to move

> *That this Assembly condemns the treatment by the then Irish Government of many Irish World War II veterans, particularly the issuing of the so-called starvation orders; and calls on the Government of the Republic of Ireland to issue a pardon and to apologise to the veterans and their families and to honour all those who fought against fascism in World War II.*

At the outset, I hope that the motion will be debated in measured tones on all sides of the House. The motion is timely, and I hope that the whole House can unite around it.

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

There are a number of reasons why it is important that we are debating the issue now. Given the amount of discussion in recent months about how we deal with the past, it is particularly timely that we should look at what seems to be a glaring sore from the past that can be effectively dealt with. In January 2012, we are also at the start of what has been described as the decade of anniversaries, starting with the sinking of the Titanic and going through a range of issues such as the signing of the Ulster covenant, the formation of the Ulster Volunteers, the Easter Rising, the battle of the Somme, the creation of Northern Ireland and the partition of Ireland. It is appropriate that we look at those historic matters with a degree of context. Above all, the motion is timely because, for many of the veterans who are affected by the motion, time is running out. We have a dwindling band of soldiers from the Second World War, and, as time marches on, those veterans become fewer and fewer. As well as being historical, the issue deeply affects a number of people today. It is not only the veterans whom I mentioned who are affected but, to this day, their families are affected by what happened in 1945. It will be beneficial if the Assembly can, with a united voice, send a message that we wish that stigma to be removed.

The motion is not intended to have a go at the Irish Republic. Indeed, the intention is quite the reverse. I will make specific reference to the actions that were taken during the war and in 1945 by the then Irish Government under Eamon de Valera, and I will be highly critical of those actions. The Irish citizens who fought in the war have not been given sufficient recognition. The motion calls not only for those soldiers to be pardoned but for an honour to be bestowed on them by the Irish Government.

In the Second World War, roughly 50,000 citizens of the Irish Republic — Éire, as it was then — fought against fascism. We all owe them a debt of gratitude not only on this side of the House as citizens of the United Kingdom but as part of modern Europe. The stand that they took in helping others to fight against fascism means that we are able to enjoy democracy today. It is important that, in the Republic and in the United Kingdom, people who made that stand are given due recognition. The motion is designed also to complement the worthy campaign that has been launched in the Irish Republic and involves senators, TDs and many members of the public in urging the current Minister for Defence, Alan Shatter, to issue a pardon. Hopefully, Minister Shatter and others will listen to the debate and to what resonates from it.

For those who are unaware of the situation, when the Second World War was declared, about 50,000 citizens from the Irish Republic were involved in the British Army, the British air force and the Royal Navy. They took part in just about every action imaginable on the European front, in north Africa and on the Japanese front. Indeed, I know that one of the surviving veterans was one of the liberators of Belsen. That shows the courage of these people. Unfortunately, it was a courage that was not repaid by their Government.

Although many of the 50,000 suffered various forms of discrimination, there was a particular problem for just under 5,000 Irish veterans who had left the Irish Army or deserted it to join the British Army. There were a range of reasons why they did so. For many, it was, perhaps, about ties of kinship; for some, it was a desire to stop Hitler; perhaps for some young men it was simply that they had a sense of adventure. Whatever their motivation, they played a vital role in trying to defend democracy. Yet, what was the response that they got? Some of those who came home during the Emergency, as it was called in the South, found themselves court-martialled and immediately put in jail. In 1945, however, all 5,000 found themselves court-martialled, generally speaking, in their absence and were not even given the opportunity to defend themselves. They were then placed on what was called "the list", which was circulated to public bodies, and they were denied public employment and welfare.

The end result for many of those citizens of the Irish Republic, most of whom decided to stay there, was years of hardship for them and their families. The 1945 orders were known colloquially as the starvation orders, and there are testimonies, particularly from some of the children of those soldiers, that, in some cases, that is literally what they meant. One testimony speaks of their bellies sticking to their ribs with hunger. There was clearly a form of discrimination.

To be fair, a number of TDs opposed the legislation at the time. It was not unanimously supported; it was opposed strongly by opposition TDs in the Dáil. Indeed, it percolated not simply to the soldiers themselves but to their families and their children. One particularly chilling example is that of orphan children of the soldiers and their families who were placed in state institutions. Many of them were singled out for special treatment, by which we mean a degree of harsh discrimination. There is a sick irony that the initials used to denote the children in those institutions were SS. The resonance of what had gone on before speaks volumes about that.

The only argument that could be used was that those soldiers had deserted the Irish Army and that surely there should be some level of sanction. Leaving aside the bravery of what they did, they were not even treated on the same basis as others who had deserted the Irish Army. During the Second World War, approximately 7,000 men left the Irish Army. Just under 5,000 of those fought with the British Army; yet the list and the starvation orders applied only to those who had left to fight in the Second World War against

fascism. The 2,000 others, who had deserted for a number of other reasons —some of them to engage in criminality — were not discriminated against in that way.

There is a great historic wrong, which still resonates. Indeed, anyone who has read the testimonies of some of the surviving veterans will think of a man called Phil Farrington, who, although 92, still fears a knock on the door. One listens to the testimony of the children of some of those veterans who feel, even now, that they are not in a position to commemorate the brave sacrifices that their father or grandfather made in the Second World War. They are not able to display medals and have to acknowledge them on the quiet. The issue still resonates.

As I indicated, the decisions were taken during and at the end of the Second World War. I suspect that no one in the current Irish Government was even alive at that time, and I am not someone who believes that the sins of the fathers should continue to be the responsibility of the current Irish Government. However, there is an opportunity for the current Irish Government to put right what happened. They can acknowledge that a wrong was done and issue an apology and a pardon to those ex-servicemen and their families. Removing that stigma is far more important than compensation, which is sometimes mentioned. It is an issue not of money but of removing the stigma and doing what is right by people. Even at this late hour, such a gesture would move things forward.

I acknowledge that, in recent years, there has been a degree of reassessment in the Irish Republic of their involvement in the First World War in particular. A healing process and an embracing of the fact that many Irish citizens fought in the First World War has started. At times, that perhaps has not applied to the Second World War, and this is an opportunity to acknowledge what went wrong in the past, to provide some degree of healing, to remove the stigma and to allow the individuals who are still alive and their families a bit of dignity and closure on the issue. Therefore, I commend the motion to the House in the hope that a unanimous voice from the Assembly will aid those in the Irish Republic who are campaigning for these individuals.

Mr A Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Member for bringing the matter to the House. I will place on record what has been my party's position on this for some time. We welcome the fact that Minister Shatter in the Irish Government in Dublin has referred the matter to the Attorney General for further legal advice to see what can be done to resolve the legalities that are still involved. I commend the Member for the tenor in which he introduced the motion, and I would like to think that that will be carried through in the debate. Clearly, such matters remain contentious, difficult and sensitive to many people, voices and communities across this country. I appreciate the fact that the Member introduced the motion in a very mature fashion.

The passage of time has allowed reflection on many of these matters, and a considerable degree of reconciliation is at the heart of many of the initiatives and gestures that have taken place over the past number of years. The Member pointed out that these things are quite difficult, complex and, indeed, contentious. If the Assembly deals with these matters in the way that we have begun to address them this afternoon, we can give a clear lead to wider society on how we can deal with and respond appropriately to the upcoming centenaries in the next short few years. We can use those centenary events as a means of educating and familiarising ourselves with other people's perspectives on history and as a form of reconciliation as opposed to a form of conflict. We do not need to rehearse any of those battles; we need to respect people's views of history and to move on in a mature way. In the way in which we deal with these matters, the Assembly has already begun to give a very clear lead today.

Many citizens from this country, North and South, have joined British forces and, indeed, other forces to fight against fascism over many generations. Unfortunately, many of those individuals died on the field of battle, making many sacrifices. For the most part, those sacrifices have been regularised in annual commemorations, so we support the idea and the concept that it would be appropriate if the continued stigma endured by many of the people who left the Irish Defence Forces and their families, who are still alive today, could be removed and the matter redressed.

5.00 pm

Given the time lapse, it would be difficult to pursue all the individual cases and circumstances. Therefore, we think that a pardon is probably the best means of moving forward. So, we believe that a general pardon for those in that category would be an appropriate way to bring the matter to a close.

I will make one point, which is that other people left this island to join other forces, not least among them the International Brigade, which people joined to fight against fascism in Spain. Everybody has their own view of such matters, but I welcome the tone in which this matter has been introduced. It is positive and constructive and I hope that it will remain so throughout the debate.

Mr Copeland: I, too, pay tribute to the Members who tabled the motion and I acknowledge the magnanimous treatment of it by Mr Maskey.

The service of Irishmen and Irishwomen in the British Army, the Royal Navy and, more latterly, the Air Force, is a matter of recorded history that goes back for centuries. Those who decided to leave, if that is the appropriate word, the Irish Army in 1939 to serve in the British Army in the fight against fascism were, in many cases, following in their fathers' footsteps. Many of their fathers would have been among the 350,000 Irishmen who joined the British Army, in the absence of conscription, during the Great War. More than 50,000 of them never returned home.

The colours of those regiments — the Munster Fusiliers, the Leinster Regiment, the Royal Dublin Fusiliers; endless titles stretching back centuries — were ceremonially hung in cathedrals in England, and with them their history. Yet these men joined the 38th Brigade, which was specially created by Winston Churchill and had as its badge a black shamrock. It has recently come back into existence, and the service of the Royal Irish Regiment, in particular, takes place in the context of the 38th Brigade. A few years ago, the last surviving unit from the Somme — the 107th Infantry Brigade, which was the last attachment in the British Army of the 36th Ulster Division slipped quietly into history.

It is true that all nations have things in their history of which they are ashamed or which they might do differently

a second time round. Generally, the older and greater the nation, the more significant such stains will be. However, the treatment of those men, at the conclusion of what the Irish Government referred to as "the Emergency", started when they returned home. They set aside the implements and uniforms of war. Like others, they turned their faces toward the sun and set about rebuilding the earth. However, when they got home, they found little comfort.

That this matter remains unresolved highlights and drives chisels into the relationships that are now starting to be formed in the Chamber. Left unaddressed, it will signify a serious lesson for us all. To conspire against those who did what they believed to be right and to evidence in legislation a weight against them is a serious matter.

There are lessons for us in the Chamber and in society regarding the way in which the army conducted itself during the Second World War. A case in point is a unit in which many of those individuals served, the Royal Irish Fusiliers. Its members were recruited — forgive my terminology — in the south of the North and the north of the South. It was about 60% nationalist and 40% unionist. It laboured successfully under the ministrations of the regimental padre, a Jesuit priest called Father Dan.

After the battalion had played its role in the liberation of Rome, with an enthusiasm that you can probably imagine, Father Dan decided that that battalion of Irish soldiers would visit the Vatican, which did not go without remark. However, regardless of their political opinion or religious background, members of the battalion were required to attend. Englishman Colin Gunner, whom I believe was a captain at that stage, recorded in his diary how that was handled. He noted that the battalion was assembled in a room in the Vatican. He said that he remembered the striking presence of a small man as he entered the room — the Pope. He remarked on his dancing eyes as he said how wonderful it was to see the sons of St Patrick in the Holy City, while stern-faced Ulstermen mumbling 'The Boyne Water' milled about the back of the room. Within that there is surely a lesson for all of us.

I firmly believe that this issue needs addressed. It is a matter for the authorities in what is now the Republic of Ireland — at that time, the Irish Free State — to redress a very great wrong. I commend the motion in its current form to the House and thank those who have contributed so far for the magnanimous way in which they have done so.

Mr McDevitt: This is, undoubtedly, an important debate. We must all acknowledge that it can only be seen as a sign of maturity and progress in this institution that we are able to come together to discuss an issue such as this in the responsible way that we have done to date. I acknowledge that on behalf of the SDLP.

I speak as a proud Irish citizen, a republican and someone whose parents were children of "the Emergency", as the Second World War is officially known in the Republic of Ireland. Of course, this debate, as Mr Maskey and Mr Weir pointed out, takes place in the wider context of a unique threat to what everyone in the House would consider to be a way of life — the threat of fascism — and in the context of a tradition, during the Spanish Civil War, of international brigades and of people uniting across national divides and identities to fight what they perceived to be, and was later proven to be, a very serious threat to the values that all of us hold dear.

It is important to acknowledge, though, that, at the time, the Irish state was in its infancy. The point made by Mr Copeland about states being able to deal with matters in a more sober way as they grow older is a well-made one. So came to pass a decision by the then Irish Government that created a situation against people who had left the Irish Army to join the Allied forces which is deserving of redress and reconsideration at this point in our history.

It is worth putting on the record of this House the words of Alan Shatter TD, the Minister for Defence, on 5 July in the other House on this island, Dáil Éireann. I will not read all of his contribution, but I will read the last paragraph, because it is the essential kernel of what we all need to work our way through in the next few months. He said:

> *"Members of the Defence Forces who served during the "Emergency" were engaged in important service for their country and it is crucial that no decisions are made that would in any way diminish or undervalue their loyalty to the State and the service given by them to the State. However, I accept that many of those who deserted, went on to fight against fascism in World War II and did so out of a sense of idealism and with a commitment to protect democracies from tyranny and totalitarianism. Had there been a different outcome to World War II there is no reason to believe that this State would have been immune to invasion."*

With the benefit of history, I guess that that is that. Now, at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, we probably all hope in our hearts that, with the advice of an Attorney General, without prejudice to those men and women who remained members of Óglaigh na hÉireann, which is the official name of the Irish defence forces — the only organisation on this island that is entitled to carry that name, I hasten to add — they can be honoured, and, at the same time, we can reach a point when the idealism and commitment of those who, for whatever reason, chose to fight fascism can be acknowledged too.

Mr Lunn: I will say straight away that we, too, support the motion. I have never attended a potentially contentious debate in the House that was conducted in such measured tones, as Mr Weir put it. There appears to be complete unanimity, and I will certainly not be doing anything to change that.

Mr McDevitt referred to Mr Shatter's recent confirmation that he will give active consideration to this matter. Mr McDevitt also referred to the statement — which I think he attributed to Alan Shatter but which I thought was from the Irish Defence Minister — that, had there been a different outcome to World War II, there is no reason to believe that that state would have been immune from invasion. That surely confirms official sympathy, at least, for the cause that we are talking about.

With the benefit of hindsight, in taking the action that they took, these men acted honourably and very bravely. However, I imagine that the world was a different place in the 1940s. Ireland had a standing army. People left — I will try not to use the word "deserters" — their own forces to fight for what they thought was a more honourable cause, and they have been vilified ever since. Times have changed so much

over the years, and I can only join others in saying that I hope that that wrong can be righted at an early stage.

Since those days, the atmosphere in the relationship between Britain and Ireland has been totally transformed by various actions, most notably perhaps by the Southern state's recognition of the contribution of its own people who, in World War II, volunteered to fight for the British forces for the cause of freedom and, indeed, participated in both World Wars, at the Somme and at Gallipoli. I visited Gallipoli a few years ago, and there was a movement to raise a memorial to the Irish division that fought there. It has taken almost 100 years to do that, but time heals.

President McAleese's actions in attending the Somme commemorations; the Island of Ireland Peace Park, which fully acknowledges the contribution; the Islandbridge memorial; in particular, Her Majesty the Queen's astonishing and enlightened actions on her visit to Dublin last year; and the entire Northern Ireland peace process have led to greater recognition of each other's point of view and a much warmer acceptance of the need to move on and put old enmities behind us.

For all those reasons, the time is right for this debate. I hope that we can send a gentle message of encouragement to the Southern Government rather than any kind of demand. Given the tone of the debate, it seems certain that that is what will happen. I hope that we can be unanimous on the matter. That is all that I have to say about it.

Mr Poots: Hindsight is absolutely wonderful. If a few people had it as a gift to use before they made decisions, the world would be a much better place. Unfortunately, that is not the case. However, in recent years, the relationship between the Irish Republic and the UK has moved forward dramatically.

There are many things that, on reflection, people have decided to change, and change considerably. Reference was made to Irish people who were executed as deserters from the British Army. Of course, those people have been pardoned. The pardon will not bring them back, but it brings some conclusion for their families. Another example was when I, as the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, met Mary McAleese, the then President of the Irish Republic, at Messines, and there was recognition of the contribution not just of the 36th Ulster Division but, very importantly, the 16th Irish Division, which actually lost more lives during the First World War. That contribution was not recognised for many years. We have to pay some credit to Bertie Ahern for that, as he wanted to press forward and encourage greater recognition of the sacrifice made by individuals.

5.15 pm

We have also seen the establishment of the Boyne centre and recognition of the site's importance in European history. Again, that was an important step forward by the Irish Government. More recently, Her Majesty the Queen visited Dublin and recognised events that took place in the past, even those around the Easter Rising. However, there are things that remain unaddressed and, unfortunately, this is one of them.

From reading the debate that took place in the Dáil and, indeed, the article by Tom McGurk in 'The Sunday Business Post' yesterday, I think that there is a degree of reluctance on the part of some; they are holding back. A little bigotry may even remain, and that needs to be dealt with and challenged if we are to truly move forward. Thankfully, we are not in the situation we once were, when the then President of the Irish Republic, Eamon de Valera, described having a Catholic Parliament for a Catholic people, to which Lord Craigavon responded by saying that we will have a Protestant Parliament for a Protestant people. Thankfully, we are not in that kind of era any more, and looking back on it, it is not where we want to be. In respect of moving things forward and dealing with the past, I think that it is very important that the Government in the Republic of Ireland recognise that this is an issue or problem from the past that they need to deal with.

Mr McGurk said that the punishment given to the soldiers was relatively mild. However, I do not think that Paddy Reid, whose father and uncle bravely fought the Japanese, feels that it was a relatively mild punishment, given that he said they had to move from one slum to another, with no proper clothing or food, except for maybe a slice of bread a day. Let us face it: the young Irishmen who signed up to fight the Nazis and Japanese fought some of the most brutal, imperialist regimes the world has ever seen. What the Nazis did is wholly and totally unacceptable to any person. So the people who went out and fought them at that time did something that was brave and honourable.

People have said that Ireland could have entered the war. Winston Churchill, I think, said once that, if you leave it long enough, the Americans will eventually do the right thing. However, in this case, Ireland did not enter the war. The only opportunity, therefore, for Irish people to fight the Nazis and the imperial powers that would have destroyed the world was to do what they did. I commend them, and I wish that they were commended by the Irish Government at this time.

Mr G Robinson: First, I pay tribute to the brave men who crossed the border to fight for justice and freedom and who will lie in foreign fields for ever. Their contribution to the Allied war effort was appreciated by many, except perhaps some in their homeland. I hope that the Irish Government will do right by those who did and did not come home by granting them the pardon that they richly deserve and by apologising for the demeaning way in which those who came home were treated.

The Irish soldiers who fought with the Allies were not the cowards that de Valera and his Government were. They saw the threat from Nazi Germany and did what was right to prevent the spread of a Nazi dictatorship. The Irish soldiers who crossed the border and fought with the Allies in World War II should be immensely praised and respected for their actions. The Irish Government, however, put those men's names on a blacklist that stopped them from getting a job after they returned from war. The families of those soldiers kept their relatives' role in World War II a secret, such was the depth of propaganda about their being traitors and the fear of reprisal. That is a disgraceful situation, and the Irish Government must rectify it as a matter of urgency by reinstating, at Government level, the dignity and respect that those men thoroughly deserve.

One veteran of the D-Day landings described coming home to find that he was thought of as just a renegade. Talking about his fighting role, he said:

> *"When we went to Germany, we found it was a worthwhile cause."*

That says it all: they were despised at home, but heroes in action.

Earlier this month, serving TD Gerald Nash told the BBC Radio 4 programme 'Face the Facts: Deserters Deserted' that:

> *"What happened to them was vindictive and not only a stain on their honour but on the honour of Ireland."*

The Emergency Powers (362) Order, in denying the returning soldiers all pay and pension rights as well as banning them from any employment paid for by the state for seven years, was a measure of the contempt that de Valera had for soldiers who fought to free Ireland from Nazi dictatorship, so blinded was he by his contempt for the British.

It is time that Ireland recognised the role its citizens played in defeating Hitler and apologised without exception to those who were treated in such a shameful fashion by the then Government. I hope that every Member will support the motion, and I urge the Irish Government to give those men and their families the appropriate recognition that they deserve.

Mr Kinahan: I, like everyone else, am very pleased to speak in favour of the motion, but I am particularly pleased to be speaking in a debate in which everyone is conciliatory and moving in the right direction. I hate seeing the military brought into politics, but this is a very important case, and we must all pull together — indeed, we are pulling together — to see it resolved.

The bare principles of the case are of discipline against morality. Considering what was happening at the time, I would not take away from any army its right to discipline those who leave it when it is recruiting. I would never condone Hitler or fascism, but he was pulling Germany together from the depths of despair, and it was seen by many as a country on the rise. At the same time, Ireland was post-civil war and fervently anti-British — although not everybody was. It was a new, proud state wanting to be itself in its new way. Here, people were leaving their army and fighting for what we now see as a just cause, but we must realise from a military point of view that we should never condone anyone who leaves their army and leaves their country unprotected.

Even then, many were against it. There was the Opposition, the public and all those who wanted to fight fascism. Even de Valera himself was doing deals on the side. He did not stand back and do nothing; he allowed the Sunderland flying boats to fly from the Shannon, and he allowed half of Tory Island to be used by the navy. Even he realised that there was a way forward and that things would probably change.

If we look at things that have happened to us, we can see that, in time, many things change, but at least we have seen fascism, totalitarianism and communism all collapse in the past 30 or 40 years. We have all learned that democracy and justice are right, but those soldiers did not have justice at the time. Often, they knew what was happening only when they got home and were arrested. Of course, all were fighting for what we now take for granted: freedom of speech.

I put it to everyone, and many have mentioned it already, that when we look at this new morality, we can see that lots of things have changed, and others have given examples. Look at the VC of Able Seaman Magennis and how it was taken up to Belfast, with a statue put up outside City Hall. That was one change. Able Seaman Magennis, who had been incredibly brave, was not allowed to go back and take his medal and be celebrated for his bravery.

On a much more minor point, the North Irish Horse Reconnaissance Squadron, which I was with at one time, was able to go down to St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin and dedicate the South Irish Horse banner that was in the church. Many things have been moving and changing. We have seen the acceptance of the poppy by nearly all, and we wish to see that as something we can all celebrate. We have seen, as others have mentioned, the Queen's visit, but it is time to move on. It is time to find our way forward and to celebrate the Irish soldier who, whether from North or South, has been the backbone of many armies. In fact, Agricola, one of Caesar's generals, considered whether he might land in Ireland but was told that the Irish were fierce soldiers who often fought against themselves, and so he held back from moving to Ireland.

We saw in the film 'Braveheart', about William Wallace, that the Irish soldiers were thrown into battle by the English. Wherever there was a war, they were game: the English Civil War, Waterloo, the American Civil War. We have already heard about their involvement in the First World War, and mention was made of the Spanish Civil War. In many, many cases brave Irish and Northern Irish soldiers were involved, and it is good today to see everyone celebrate their heroism.

We must remember that, in 1946, as others have said, they went home, probably having had a miserable time for three or four years, whether in a prison camp or fighting at the far end of the world. They went home expecting to be celebrated but found themselves on a blacklist. That list stopped them having any pension. They were damned for seven years as unable to work for the Government. Today, we ask for a pardon for them.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is nearly up.

Mr Kinahan: We have seen, in this House, an admirable stance taken by everybody to put the pressure on the Irish Government to pardon them.

Mr Attwood: I acknowledge that the tone of the debate was captured, and rightly so, by Mr Weir in his opening remarks. These sorts of issues, and many others that we will have to face over the next 10 years, carry the risk that they might fracture or fragment the Assembly and the community. The tone, character and content of the debate send out a very different message to that particular risk.

As I have outlined previously in the Chamber, I am named after a man who died in the First World War, my great uncle Alex Attwood. He lies in an unmarked grave in Nieuport on the Belgian coast. As I said, he came from Northampton. He had a different national identity, and he happened to have a different religious tradition from mine. However, he is very much a member of my family, as is my Uncle Alec, a man from Cork, an Irish nationalist, who served in the Second World War for the British Army. He was boarding a ship in India on the way to the Far East when the Americans dropped bombs on Japan. At that very moment, another uncle of mine, Uncle Jack Corcoran, married to my father's sister, was in a Japanese prisoner of war camp.

I cannot honour and respect those men, their memory and their contribution without respecting and honouring all those

of this island who fought in the British Army and other Allied forces, however they came to serve in the British Army or other Allied forces. In my view, you cannot respect and honour the one without respecting and honouring all. That is the perspective that I bring to this.

It is quite clear, as has been captured by many who spoke in this debate, that this issue and the various strands of our history and its emerging narrative are a work in progress. That was best illustrated in recent times by the visit of the Queen and the President of Ireland to Islandbridge. Alasdair McDonnell and I, and many others, were there to reflect and acknowledge that shared part of our history and the great loss that happened.

Danny Kinahan rightly acknowledged that, while the Irish state was neutral in the Second World War, it was neutral but pro-Allied. People might argue about some of this, but, in many ways, the Irish state at that time demonstrated how it was pro-Allied but neutral. We must acknowledge in this debate the integrity of the position adopted by the Irish Government at that time. Given its history and the process of history that it had just come through, the position it adopted was one of integrity. That is something that, as we engage in this debate and move this story and narrative forward, we need to acknowledge: the integrity of the position of the Irish people, that which the Irish Government adopted at the time, and the will of the people of Ireland to be neutral but pro-Allied.

I want to acknowledge the fact that the Irish Government are considering this matter. Indeed, a further question was put to the Minister of Defence in the Dáil last week. Therefore, as we move forward, I believe that the Irish Government will be informed by what is the right outcome in a complex situation, and we need to acknowledge that complexity.

5.30 pm

I want to acknowledge what Peter Weir said in his opening comments. He placed the issue in the context of the decade of centenary commemorations on which we are now embarking. Clearly, the issue is also in the context of our approaching the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War. It must also be put in the context of the unresolved issues arising from the most recent conflict that impacted on the lives of the people of this island. If we are to address in a generous, inclusive and full manner all the issues from 100 years ago and 60 years ago, we must equally bring to the experience of the past 40 years the principles of commemoration, honour, acknowledgment, accountability and explanation.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member bring his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Attwood: Yes. All those standards apply to all those events.

Mr McClarty: I fully support the motion. War veterans of the Allied forces in World War II should be celebrated for their selfless bravery, not vilified because of political prejudice. The decision of the Irish Government in 1945 was wrong. Indeed, the Fine Gael Opposition recognised that and appealed for the annulment of the Emergency Powers Order, which, in effect, was conceived to punish Irishmen who served in the British Army. During a period that followed contentious events, including partition, it would be an understatement to say that the British were not flavour of the day in Ireland at the time. Of course, de Valera's Government found it hard to stomach young Irishmen deserting the national force to fight for the British, particularly at a time of emergency. However, the issue must be put in context. Those were passionate young men who heard about evil being spread across Europe by fascist groups and wanted to fight against it and what they felt was wrong. Indeed, the Irish Government accepts that it was wrong.

World War II happened in an era in which young men felt impassioned to fight for the greater good. The Republic of Ireland's neutrality meant that the situation there was stagnant; men who signed up to fight were becoming frustrated and restive. They felt that the only way that they could contribute and stand up and be counted towards the war effort was to fight, so they joined the Allied forces. At the time, World War II was much bigger than the problems that existed in Ireland; it transcended Europe and affected the world. Those young men fought not against Ireland but for it; they fought for democracy. Unfortunately, the prejudices of de Valera's Government did not recognise that. Those brave men should, therefore, be celebrated.

It sits uncomfortably with me that, in Northern Ireland, our men were welcomed home as heroes while, across the border, Irishmen were vilified and treated as traitors for bravely fighting in the same brutal war as their counterparts several miles north. The imposed consequences of the Emergency Powers Order were harsh. Indeed, those committing malicious crimes received far lesser sentences. If the Irish Government cannot pardon the young men for their desertion, they must at least accept responsibility for the harsh consequences that they imposed. At the time, the political environment was less than ripe for that, but it has much improved since. Indeed, British-Irish relations have never been better; Her Majesty's visit to the Republic last year was a positive symbol of that. The Irish Government need to correct their grave mistake. Not only will that restore the dignity of and respect for surviving and past Irish servicemen and their families, which they deserve, it will highlight the maturity and integrity of the Irish Government and show the world how far we have all come.

I urge the Irish Government, in particular Alan Shatter TD, Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence, to retrospectively pardon these brave Irish men.

Mr Humphrey: On behalf of those of us who tabled the motion, I thank all the contributors in the Chamber for the tenor in which this debate has taken place and the tone in which they have spoken.

The proposer of the motion, Mr Weir, talked about how the House should unite, and that is exactly what has happened: the House has united behind a motion which is, in my view, infinitely fair.

The time of recrimination around these matters has passed; it is now a time for moving forward. Peter mentioned the starvation orders, the orphanages and the appalling way the families of those veterans were treated on their return to Ireland. He said that recognition, an apology and a pardon were needed.

Alex Maskey, on behalf of Sinn Féin, said that the matter has now been referred to the Irish Attorney General and that the Assembly at Stormont should take a lead, as that could be important for the centenaries that we will celebrate between

now and 2021. He said that his party supports this stigma's being removed and said that a pardon was the best means of going forward.

Michael Copeland, on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, talked about the Royal Irish Fusiliers being 60% nationalist, and he also mentioned Irish soldiers, many of them Catholic, arriving in Rome and meeting the Pope.

Conall McDevitt of the SDLP talked about people uniting across traditional divides to fight fascism as a common enemy when the Irish Free State was in its infancy. We, on these Benches, should remember that. He also mentioned the role that Alan Shatter has as the Irish Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence.

Trevor Lunn, on behalf of the Alliance Party, quoted the Irish defence spokesman as well, and he talked of his time visiting the Island of Ireland Peace Park. He said that a message sent from this Assembly to Dublin would be powerful, if all agreed.

Edwin Poots, speaking from the Back Benches, mentioned meeting the Irish President at Messines and talked of the Boyne site and her Majesty the Queen's visit to the Republic. He also said that issues outstanding in the Irish Government need to be recognised and addressed.

George Robinson said that Irish soldiers should be praised and mentioned the treatment of their families. He said they were heroes in action but treated as deserters at home.

Danny Kinahan, on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, said that Eire was a divided state at the time of the war. He spoke of the many military tributes that he knows of, as an ex-serviceman. He also mentioned the poppy. At this stage, I would like to mention the poppy and, as I did in this House before, pay tribute to the SDLP and its former leader Margaret Ritchie for the stance that she took the year before last in relation to the poppy. My community and Members on these Benches warmly welcomed that recognition by a nationalist leader and the courage that she showed in wearing that poppy. I also pay tribute to my good friend Councillor Pat Convery who, when Lord Mayor of Belfast, launched the poppy appeal in City Hall. That is leadership, and that is reaching out across divides and healing wounds of the past.

Alex Attwood mentioned his family and the service that they had given to the British Crown during the war. He also mentioned the important role this Assembly would have over the next 10 years.

David McClarty said that it was time for the soldiers' bravery to be recognised and not the prejudice of others. He also mentioned the Fine Gael Government of the time and the fact that the soldiers were fighting for democracy and were uniting to fight against fascism.

It falls to me to wind up the debate on behalf of my party, and I, obviously, support the motion. When we talk about the attitude of the Republic to World War II in general and its veterans in particular, we should place that in the context of how it approaches the commemoration of other conflicts. It is only recently that the Southern state started to acknowledge the sacrifice of the First World War. In 2012 we will have the first Irish Government Minister officially attending the commemoration service in Belfast, owing to a motion recently passed by Belfast City Council, which was proposed by the SDLP and seconded by my own party.

Although we have made great strides in changing attitudes to the First World War and those who served in it, the same cannot be said of the Second World War, a war that holds much more difficult issues for the Irish Republic, not least the question of why de Valera was the only statesman in Europe to sign Hitler's book of condolence. He refused to accept that it was a world war; instead, his Government deemed it as "the Emergency".

Although the Government of the Free State had an official policy of neutrality, the people did not. There was an excellent series of programmes produced by Ulster Television and presented by Paul Clarke called 'We Were Brothers Too', which offered a fascinating insight into the issue. At a time when some citizens were executing the S-plan, between 40,000 and 50,000 men from the Free State — indeed some suggest as many as 80,000 — joined the Allied armies. Among them were men who took part in D-Day and in the liberation of the Belsen concentration camp. Some of those men even received the Victoria Cross, including Captain Harold Ervine-Andrews VC, who was driven out of his home in County Cavan by the IRA when he returned from the war. These men were described by their Government, unfortunately, as deserters, yet they left defence forces in a state that was neutral and fought for an army that was engaged in the war against fascism: they were the bravest of the brave.

We have already heard about the starvation orders. In 1945, the leader of Fine Gael, Tom O'Higgins, described them as illegal, unconstitutional, brutal, un-Christian, inhumane, stimulated by malice, seething and hatred, and oozing with venom. Those are comments that the current Irish Justice and Defence Minister, Alan Shatter, who is from that party, needs to take on board.

Those orders not only punished brave men who served but inflicted the most brutal and grinding poverty on their families and children. In many cases, the children, as Mr Weir mentioned, were forced into orphanages or workhouses by the state. Anyone who has read the accounts of the vile and inhumane treatment that these men and their families received will understand that it did not just come from the state but also from fellow citizens who were greatly moved in their opposition to what they had done.

As we know, they were barred from seeking state employment when they returned home. That stands in stark contrast to the experience that other ex-servicemen received in the late 1940s. Indeed, SS officer Louis Feutren was granted residency by the de Valera Government and was employed as a teacher in Dublin for 30 years, and the Nazi collaborator Alan Heusaff, who took part in the massacre of Jews in France, was granted Irish citizenship after the war. These are all things with which the Republic will eventually have to deal.

The final point that I would like to make is about the pardon. We should be honouring all those who fought against fascism in the war. It should be a national disgrace that men who fought so bravely for the liberation of Europe are not honoured in their own country. The Irish Republic owes a great deal of debt to the Allied forces in the Second World War, because regardless of neutrality — Mr Attwood is right

that it was officially a neutral country — had Germany won the war the Irish Free State or Éire would have been as independent as Vichy France.

I hope that the current Government in Dublin, by considering this issue, are taking steps to recognise the errors of their forebears and are finally moving towards official recognition of the role that these brave men played in securing freedom for all nations. I welcome the decision to refer the matter to the Irish Attorney General.

To be fair in this context, it must also be remembered that the British Army asked an Garda Síochána to vet potential recruits to the British armed forces to ensure that those recruited were not members of the IRA or from families connected with it. Both the Cosgrave and de Valera Governments did nothing to prevent recruitment to the British Crown forces. Indeed, David Robertson, who was head of history at Wilson's Hospital School in Westmeath, declared that as many as 80,000 men from the Republic fought in the British forces against fascism.

In conclusion, they have never received recognition or respect, yet Irish history — our history — remains imbalanced and distorted until they do.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

> *That this Assembly condemns the treatment by the then Irish Government of many Irish World War II veterans, particularly the issuing of the so-called starvation orders; and calls on the Government of the Republic of Ireland to issue a pardon and to apologise to the veterans and their families and to honour all those who fought against fascism in World War II.*

Adjourned at 5.45 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 24 January 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Executive Committee Business

Rates (Amendment) Bill: Accelerated Passage

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

> *That the Rates (Amendment) Bill [NIA 2/11-15]proceed under the accelerated passage procedure.*

I welcome the opportunity to address the Assembly on the motion, which will enable the speedy progression of a range of rating measures that are aimed at rebalancing the rating system and encouraging the revitalisation of our high streets.

The key measures in the Bill, including the funding provided through the large retail levy, are important in that they will help to address the issues that face many small businesses in this economic downturn. It should provide for some rebalancing in the rating system. The key measures in the Bill are important in a number of respects, not least that the funding from the large retail levy will allow the number of businesses receiving help under the small business rate relief scheme to be roughly doubled and the level of support increased by around 50%. Given that help is needed now and with the funding that will be raised through the levy, it would be a poor show if we did not implement the measures until 2013, when we all hope that the recovery will be under way. For that reason, of course, it is important that the Bill go through by accelerated passage rather than take the normal route through the Committee for scrutiny.

When I appeared before the Committee on 11 January to explain to members, as I am required to do under Standing Order 42(3), why it was necessary for the Bill to proceed by accelerated passage, I indicated the consequence if that were not granted. I had a productive session with the Committee at that stage. I thank the Committee members for recognising the need to expedite the process for the Bill and for their support in seeking Assembly approval for accelerated passage.

The use of accelerated passage is not something that I take lightly. Having been on the other side of the process, as a Chairman of a Committee and as a Back-Bench Member, I fully understand why Members wish to have the opportunity to deal with legislation properly through the line-by-line scrutiny that normally takes place in Committee. Of course, I recognise that it is a means of ensuring that legislation is fit for purpose and that we finish with the best legislation possible. However, it is important that we balance against that the fact that the packages focus on taking the strain from businesses during the economic downturn and ensuring that further decline in the high streets is halted. For that reason, it is important that we get the measure through the Assembly quickly so that it can be in place for the start of the rates year in 2012. If we do not do that, that cannot be achieved.

Some people have suggested that we should just let it go on to 2013. However, as I have said, the problem exists at present and needs to be dealt with. We cannot simply introduce changes in the middle of the rates year. Once rates bills have gone out, there would be a huge administrative issue if we had to change the size or nature of those bills in the middle of the year. Frankly, it is not possible operationally to introduce a change of that nature in the middle of a financial year; we have to introduce it for the beginning of the rates year in 2012, or it will not become operational until 2013. In the middle of the recession, it would reflect badly on the Assembly if we were not able to bring this much discussed and much welcomed measure on to the statute book at the appropriate time.

I am conscious that accelerated passage should not be used lightly or unnecessarily. As I have indicated, it will not be and has not been my form simply to use it as a means of getting things through quickly. I give the commitment to the Assembly that the Department will not be lazy in bringing forward legislation at the appropriate time. Of course, because of the timing of budgetary issues, we always have accelerated passage with the Budget Bill, but that is something that the Assembly has well accepted in the past.

Turning to my obligation under Standing Order 42(4)(c), I have already indicated that, where possible, legislation should be taken through the normal process because it ensures that due process is followed and that the Committee is afforded its proper place and given adequate time to scrutinise the Bill clause by clause. As I have said, I will take all necessary steps to ensure that accelerated passage is not unnecessarily exercised in future; I will resort to it only in exceptional circumstances.

I shall give some background. Last year, the Budget review group tasked me with taking forward measures to help businesses through the downturn. The Bill is the outcome of that process. Accelerated passage is unavoidable for the Bill as a result of the current economic plight. Members should bear it in mind that they will have the opportunity to raise issues about the detail of the Bill at Second Stage. I seek the support of the House for the accelerated passage of the Bill, and I look forward to hearing Members' comments.

Of course, I also said to the Committee that, if it requires additional information from officials during the process between now and Consideration Stage and Further Consideration Stage, officials will be available to come and speak to Committee members about any issues that may arise during the debate or subsequent issues that they wish to consider. I also want to point out that the Committee has done an extensive investigation into the Bill. Indeed, the Committee report has already informed the shape of the Bill. Therefore, there has been a degree of scrutiny.

Bearing in mind that Members will have opportunities to raise details, I ask for the same all-party support for accelerated passage in the Assembly that was demonstrated in Committee.

Mr Murphy (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Department of Finance and Personnel originally briefed my Committee on consultation proposals on the large retail levy on 8 June 2011, advising that it intended to seek accelerated passage for the Rates (Amendment) Bill. The Department also informed the Committee that it would consult publicly on proposals with a view to the subsequent legislation being passed by the new Assembly to allow its changes to take effect from April 2012.

In evidence to the Committee on 11 January 2012, the Minister outlined the reasons for accelerated passage and the need for changes to take effect from April. I am mindful that the Committee may not have the opportunity to scrutinise issues during the normal Committee Stage in advance of the Bill being introduced to the Assembly. The Committee undertook detailed analysis of the policy proposals and took views from a range of stakeholders to establish a sound evidence base for its report on the proposals. It published its report on the proposed large retail levy and the expansion of the small business rate relief scheme on 7 December 2011.

The Committee recognises the urgent need for the measures, in particular the need to facilitate steps to ease the disproportionate rating burden on small businesses during the economic downturn. The Committee also notes that the provisions regarding the large retail levy are short-term in nature. Members received assurance from the Minister that the levy will not apply beyond March 2015. The Committee agreed that it was content to support the Minister on seeking approval for the Bill to proceed by accelerated passage, having been satisfied by the explanations and assurances provided. On behalf of the Committee, I therefore support the motion that the Rates (Amendment) Bill be granted accelerated passage.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for tabling the motion. I want to reiterate the Chairperson's comments. As a Committee, we have already done extensive work on consultation with key stakeholders on the issue. It is important that, as an Assembly, we react to what is a very trying time for the economy and the retail market in particular. It was important that we addressed that. I appreciate that it is probably not best practice to go down the route of putting a Bill through by accelerated passage; however, in the circumstances, it is vital that we move quickly to put legislation in place to allow us to move forward in time for April. I appreciate that the Committee has already been lobbied on the issues. Changes that the Committee identified have been taken into account in bringing forward some of the considerations that are before the House. I appreciate that they will be discussed at Second Stage. Therefore, I am pleased to support the Bill going forward under accelerated passage.

Mr Cree: Similarly, the Ulster Unionist Party understands the need for the Bill. It certainly supports its accelerated passage through the House.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Like the other parties, the SDLP is willing to support the accelerated passage of the Bill. My party is usually wary of accelerated passage and forgoing the usual Committee scrutiny process. However, we are satisfied that the urgency of the need among smaller retailers should encourage us to support accelerated passage at this stage. We are satisfied that the Committee process to date has resulted in the collection of objective evidence that has informed members of my party and other Committee members on the issue. Therefore, we are happy to support accelerated passage on this occasion.

10.45 am

Mr Allister: The contributions to date have been quite predictable in their compliance. Some might say that my contribution will be equally predictable in its non-compliance. However, I think that there is an issue of significant importance to do with the workings of the House. Our Standing Orders make it clear that resort to accelerated passage is to be exceptional; yet, this morning, people such as Mr Girvan jumped to their feet to express their pleasure in supporting something that is meant to kick in only when it is exceptional. The excuse is that we have to give relief to small businesses. We do, but the terms of the Bill do not give that relief to small businesses. That comes by another mechanism. This is about funding that relief; it is not about the giving of that relief. Therefore, it is a deception by some if they believe that.

The real focus has to be on what has been going on since the proposals were first announced on 4 March last year. It took 16 weeks to 28 June 2011 to publish a consultation document. If there was a burning desire to help small businesses and a great anxiety to make sure that we did not have slippage into 2013, what was the Department doing between 4 March and 28 June in getting out its consultation? Where was the urgency then in activating a process, which could have ended up in the House being given the due process of proper procedures? Then, of course, we had a 16-week consultation, which took us happily through to the end of October, and it took from the end of October until last week to produce a Bill. Therefore, I really do not buy into the concept that the Department has been straining every sinew and pushing hard in the interests of small business to get the Bill before the House. The House was first told about this on 4 March 2011, and it was more than 10 months before the Bill got to the House. Therefore, I repeat: if there had been urgency and anxiety, it could have manifested itself a lot sooner than now.

It is not that we have not had time. Since this Assembly came into existence, we have spent eight months proverbially twiddling our thumbs and debating motions that bind no one. This is the first legislation apart from the hangover Budget to come before the House, and what is the Executive's response? Let us ram it through, let us not

bother with due process of proper debate and let us get rid of the Committee Stage, because we know best anyhow. Perhaps there are lots of little private Members' motions that we could better spend our time on than on the detail of legislation. It sends out a very wrong and disappointing but, to me, not surprising message from the House that, when it comes to the very first legislation that we are to debate, we cannot wait to get it through. We cannot wait to avoid due process, and we cannot wait to rush it and accelerate it, whether it is exceptional or not.

Mr Wilson: I thank all Members for the views that they have expressed during this short debate. As Mr Allister said, the response has been fairly predictable. I would have been surprised had Members from other parties that were well represented on the Committee and know about the preparatory work that has been done in the run-up to today's debate not acceded to accelerated passage. I want to make it clear that the idea that the Executive somehow sit, plot and plan how they can ram legislation through the House — to use the term used by the Member for North Antrim — without due consideration for the process and everything else is nonsense. The very thought of the Executive encouraging Departments to drag their feet in bringing forward legislation is just nonsense. I think that the Members who support accelerated passage understand the exceptional circumstances out there at present much better than the Member who opposes it.

There is a recession in Northern Ireland at present. I have been round many towns in Northern Ireland, and members of the chambers of trade and commerce in those towns have shown me empty shops; they have told me about the difficulties that traders face; they have indicated the overheads that rates create for businesses; and they have asked, "What can be done by the Assembly to help us through the recession?". So, there are exceptional circumstances.

We are also going through changes in shopping patterns that are putting pressure on the high street. I suspect that — I hope that I have the number right — the 460-odd traders in the Ballymena area who will be impacted by this measure might have a message for Jim Allister today, and it is this: "If you do not think that we are living through exceptional circumstances, catch yourself on. We are living through exceptional circumstances".

Mr Allister: At no time have I suggested otherwise. At no time have I said that the legislation is not needed. What I have questioned is what the Executive have been doing since 4 March last year, when they announced the legislation, so that we could have had due process. What about the 16 weeks lost before, during and after consultation? We have heard no explanation of that.

Mr Wilson: For goodness sake, at least give me a chance to build up my argument. I want to bring Members along gradually in order to explain this. I am just going through the points that were made.

The first point was that accelerated passage should be used in only exceptional circumstances, and I am saying that there are exceptional circumstances. Therefore, the reason why Mr Girvan takes pleasure in my request for accelerated passage is that I am responding to the problems of the traders I met in Ballyclare last Friday and responding to the issues that traders face in Ballymena, Larne, Carrickfergus, Lisburn, Coleraine and Londonderry. Where else was I? I have done a tour of Northern Ireland, and I am responding to the issues raised.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. Like him, I have spoken to people across the business sector in Belfast, to Belfast City Centre Management, to the Chamber of Commerce and to local traders in my constituency. Given Mr Allister's contribution, does the Minister agree that the economic situation that prevails in the United Kingdom is the most difficult one for a long time? Indeed, the Business Secretary in our national Parliament at Westminster has said that the business climate now is the "economic equivalent of war".

Mr Wilson: I accept the point. Indeed, I think that, with this kind of legislation, we are ahead of other parts of the United Kingdom. Mary Portas suggested that this is the kind of thing that can be done to address the issue.

Mr Allister's second argument was that this is only an excuse. As he quite rightly points out —

Ms Ritchie: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: Just let me finish the point; I want to deal with this.

I am sure that we have all read the Bill, line by line, clause by clause, word by word, comma by comma and full stop by full stop. I would not expect anything less than for the assembled Members to have done that. They will have noted that the Bill does not mention small business rates relief. The Member said that the Bill is an excuse and that we talk about helping small businesses but the small business rate relief scheme is not mentioned in the Bill. It will come in separate legislation; he is right about that. However, before we can pass that legislation, there is the small question of where we get the money. There is no point in passing legislation and then searching for the money. This Bill will fund the legislation that will come forward quickly, but we must first have the funding in place.

Ms Ritchie: I thank the Minister for giving way. I do not wish to dilute the terrible economic circumstances that have beset many in our business community. However, perhaps the Minister, as a member of the Executive and as he progresses through his speech, will elucidate the general reasons why it has taken so long to bring forward legislation in a legislative Assembly.

Mr Wilson: I will come to that point. However, I am sure that the Member can think of legislation that she brought forward when she was a Minister and of the lead-in time for it. The reasons for that lead-in time will be well known to her.

The point has been made that the Bill is an excuse that has nothing to do with small business rates relief and that we should not ask for accelerated passage. However, the Bill will help to get the money for the next piece of legislation required. That legislation will be brought forward in February and will introduce 20% relief for small businesses.

The Member for South Down and the Member for North Antrim have asked a reasonable question: why, if this was announced in the Budget last year, is the legislation only before the House today? Mr Allister rightly pointed out — you can always be sure that he will have done his homework; he even had the dates — that there was a

period between 4 March and 28 June before we put the consultation document out. It may have escaped his notice that something happened between 4 March and 28 June.

Mr Allister: It did not escape your attention.

Mr Wilson: No, it did not; I did fairly well in it.

Between 4 March and 28 June, we had an election to the Assembly. The Member will also know that, in the run-up to an election, it is not permitted to introduce measures that are seen as likely to influence voters or as a means of electioneering. We could not have launched the consultation document during that period. Had we done so, I suspect that the first person to talk about bribing voters would have been none other than Mr Allister.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wilson: Let me finish my point. We could not have done that during purdah, as it would have been seen as a cynical exercise.

There was also the small matter of drawing up exactly what would be in the consultation document, and I am sure that the Member will also appreciate that any consultation document has to be cleared by the Executive. Therefore, we had the announcement in March, the run-up to the election, the drafting of the consultation document and its clearance by the Executive. That is why there was a delay between this being announced in the Budget and 28 June. I will take the intervention now.

Mr Allister: I am obliged. The Minister made the point that he could not be seen to be electioneering. However, if that was a concern, the announcement of 4 March could also be interpreted as electioneering. Purdah had not kicked in until April, if I recall correctly. Why was no work done to get the consultation out?

11.00 am

We then had a 16-week consultation. The Minister may recall that he was not so enthusiastic about having a lengthy consultation on his previous Budget, the period for which was reduced considerably and certainly did not run to anything like 16 weeks. There is that gap between 4 March, from when the Department was apparently sitting on its hands, and the end of June, when it woke up. I have not heard that properly explained.

Mr Wilson: I have explained it, but it would not matter what explanation I gave to the Member. Given the nature of what we were proposing here, if he thinks that a consultation document was going to be drawn up within a week, got out before purdah started, consulted on during the election, and drafted as legislation as quickly as that, he does not understand the process. No, I actually think that he does understand it but has chosen not to.

Ms Ritchie: I thank the Minister for giving way. Will he not accept that it has been some eight months since the election, which gave plenty of time for a consultation document to be issued, for the drafting of legislation amounting to seven or eight clauses and for revisions? Surely that is a long time to wait for a small piece of important legislation that will bring benefit to our retail establishments and our small business sector.

Mr Wilson: I understand Mr Allister's making the point about the length of time taken for the consultation. At least he shares some of my concerns about the nonsense surrounding extensive consultation, human rights considerations and all the rest. However, I really cannot understand such criticism coming from the SDLP, which was the author of half the bureaucratic nonsense that we have to go through. On many occasions, that is used against us if we do not properly consult.

The question has been asked —

Ms Ritchie: Excuse after excuse.

Mr Wilson: — why we had a 16-week consultation. This is, and has proved to be —

Ms Ritchie: Excuse after excuse.

Mr Hamilton: Your party supported it. Dominic spoke in support of it. What are you getting on about? He has just welcomed it. It is another split in the SDLP.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Lord Morrow: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: I will give way in a wee moment or two. Let me just finish my point. Splits in the SDLP are, of course, fairly common these days anyway. We can always expect around 17 opinions. How many Members does the SDLP have?

Mr Hamilton: It does not have that many.

Mr Wilson: It might have 17 opinions but fewer Members.

As I am sure Members will point out at Second Stage, this has proved to be fairly controversial legislation. It has been and will continue to be opposed by some very powerful interests. If we had shortened the consultation period, there could well have been grounds for people saying that the consultation was not properly undertaken, and, therefore, there would have been grounds for a judicial review. The maximum period of consultation, which, of course, has always had the support of the SDLP, was undertaken.

Then there was the analysis of the consultation. Indeed, as a result of that and of listening to what happened during it, I will table an amendment to the Bill on the rating of empty shops and the fact that 50% rate relief will be given to empty shops that are brought into occupation in the first year.

I am not blaming the Committee for Finance and Personnel for the gap between the consultation finishing and the legislation coming forward. The Committee undertook an excellent piece of work in doing its own investigation and producing a report. Before any legislation was drafted, we wanted to read the Committee's report. In his speech, the Chairperson of the Committee will probably mention that we accepted a number of the report's recommendations, which, of course, have been included in the legislation.

So, again, the period was stretched as a result of work that was being undertaken by the Committee. I am sure that the Members who have objected would not have wished us to ride roughshod over the Committee's report and go ahead with the production of the legislation anyway as soon as the consultation was over. As a result, there was further delay, but that delay has made the Bill a better Bill. I do not think

that anyone will condemn us for doing that. That brings us to the fact that we were into the new year and, if we were to get the Bill through in time for 2012, it would need accelerated passage.

As Mr Bradley said, the SDLP has accepted that we have to take it through by accelerated passage, although its former leader seems to take a different view. I would not have expected anything other than the opposition that I have had from Mr Allister on the motion for accelerated passage, although, given the explanation about the timeline, people will see that that really is just Mr Allister being Mr Allister and wanting to oppose anything that the Executive bring forward. If that is his role, that is fine. The important thing is that, as far as we are concerned, accelerated passage is an exceptional measure, and I have made that clear. I do not want to use that as a regular way to introduce legislation, but it is an exceptional measure for the best of reasons to ensure that, if the legislation gets through the Assembly, more than 8,000 businesses in Mr Allister's constituency, Ms Ritchie's constituency, my constituency and everyone's constituency will find a reduction in their overheads. That is a good measure, and I therefore ask for accelerated passage to be granted so that we can get on with discussing the detail of the Bill in the Assembly.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

> *That the Rates (Amendment) Bill [NIA 2/11-15] proceed under the accelerated passage procedure.*

Rates (Amendment) Bill: Second Stage

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

> *That the Second Stage of the Rates (Amendment) Bill [NIA 2/11-15] be agreed.*

I welcome the opportunity to open the debate on the Bill, which introduces a range of measures aimed at rebalancing the commercial rating system during a period of economic downturn. Before turning to the detail of the Bill, I thank the Committee for Finance and Personnel for its excellent work on the issue in recent months, particularly the extensive evidence sessions and research that it undertook. The Committee report was extremely helpful in shaping the final decisions that I, along with the Executive, reached. In a number of areas, the Committee's work has complemented the research that was undertaken by my Department. It has also, I trust, resulted in a more robust and acceptable set of proposals to which the Assembly can give its support. Although there are differences between the Committee and my Department over some aspects of the final policies, particularly on the scope of the levy, we all have a common goal of providing and funding much-needed assistance for small businesses.

The importance of the Bill is highlighted by the continuing downturn and the calls from many for measures to support small business ratepayers and to revitalise the areas of town centres that have large numbers of empty shops. Through the Bill and the associated funding of the small business rates relief scheme, the Executive want to encourage the right conditions for a sustained recovery.

Let me make it abundantly clear to Members and to those outside the Chamber that the large retail levy and the associated expansion of the small business rates relief scheme will be time-limited in legislation to three years. Both schemes will come to an end on 31 March 2015.

I will briefly address some concerns that were raised during the policy development process that relate to the impact of the levy on jobs and discouraging investment. It is important to look at those changes in proportion. The levy is a temporary change that will last for only three years; on average, it will cost about £66,000 a year per store. That represents, again on average, 0·19% — less than a fifth of one per cent — of the indicative individual store's turnover. That puts the levy in some context.

I will give a bit more context: one store that complained to me about the size of the levy, which, in its case was about £76,000, in one day sold £62,000 worth of designer handbags. I am not indicating that that was £62,000 of profit on those handbags, and I did not buy any of them. However, that puts it in context: the levy is £76,000 and, in one day, just one item in the store raised £62,000.

I also reject claims that the levy will result in reduced investment in Northern Ireland or will discourage large retailers from investing here. Although I appreciate retailers' concerns, I consider such claims to be exaggerated. For example, Waitrose has indicated that the large retail levy will not put it off potentially locating in Northern Ireland. Indeed, Waitrose is looking at opening up to 20 stores across Northern Ireland. I also do not believe what Tesco said — that £100 million of investment over 25 years will be put

in jeopardy as a result of a levy, which, over the next three years, will take £630,000 in extra tax from it. Investment decisions are not made on such margins. Large shops need to locate here to sell their goods; I doubt that any large supermarkets want to see competitors take their place. Therefore, the fact that this is a temporary measure is a key provision in the Bill. It is a proportionate measure, and I do not believe that it will lead to the disinvestment that people talk about to try to frighten us off the course of action that we have undertaken.

Another key provision of the Bill is that the large retail levy will apply to the largest and some of our most profitable retailers. In fact, it is significant that, at a time when some retailers affected by this complain about its possible impact, those retailers also boasted that their profits had been better than the previous year, their turnover was up and so on. Again, we must put it in context.

The Bill also has provisions aimed at making our town and city centres more vibrant; it will allow ratepayers to brighten up shop windows without incurring full occupied rates. That should encourage those who hold empty retail properties to work with their local communities to brighten up shopping areas in which empty properties may otherwise contribute to a run-down, neglected and forgotten appearance.

Finally, Members will be aware that, in 2010, I postponed the general non-domestic revaluation, largely due to the downturn in the property market and the lack of reliable market evidence. The Bill contains provisions to clarify the valuation assumptions used for general revaluation, and it makes more explicit the circumstances that can be taken into account in determining property values.

Before I turn to the detail of the Bill, I wish to advise Members briefly about a directly related matter that can be provided for only as a result of the Bill.

11.15 am

The money from the large retail levy will be used to fund the much-needed additional support for small business ratepayers, who continue to struggle during these difficult economic times. Through separate subordinate legislation, 20% rate relief will be provided on properties with a net annual value of between £5,001 and £10,000, with around £6 million likely to be awarded in 2012-13. Around £5 million will be raised from the levy, with the shortfall of around £1 million being met from a modest increase in regional rate revenue compared to the estimates that were made when the Budget was settled.

I turn to the detail of the legislation. Clause 1 provides for the introduction of the additional rate or levy on large retail properties with a rateable value of £500,000 or more. That will cover occupied properties for the three years through to 31 March 2015. At present, 23 companies, occupying 75 properties, will be affected. A levy of 8·52p will apply for the 2012-13 rating year. That should roughly represent a 15% increase on average on what the rate bills would otherwise be, based on the estimated district rate increases for next year.

In years two and three, the amount of levy will be set out in subordinate legislation, which the Assembly will have to debate and vote on. That will enable more up-to-date district rate figures to be used in determining what the 15% increase on the overall bill should be in the form of a regional rate increase. The clause also sets out the definition of a large retail property and retail sales of goods, and allows those to be amended by subordinate legislation. There are also minor consequential provisions to allow the large retail levy to be collected in line with the general regional rate.

Clause 2 ensures that, where shopfronts or shop window displays are used in empty retail premises, ratepayers will effectively continue to receive the 50% empty property rate relief, or an exclusion if that is applicable. Without that, full occupied rates would otherwise have been charged. That is a measure that the Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce was keen to see introduced to help brighten up town and city centres without ratepayers being penalised. The clause outlines the properties that will be covered and also provides the depth of the window display, which must not exceed 1 5 m, while the area of the window display must not exceed 5% of the floor area of the part of the building fronted by the window display. The window display must not be used for purposes of identifying a trade or business or for political purposes, or be detrimental to the advancement of good community relations.

That change will apply for three years, and will ensure that the rating system does not discourage shop owners from working with their local communities to improve the appearance of shopping areas. Given increasing numbers of empty shops, that should enable town and city centres to be made more vibrant and attractive to shoppers without ratepayers being penalised.

Clause 3 makes changes to clarify the valuation assumptions used in a non-domestic revaluation. That makes the legislation more specific about the matters that can be taken into account when a property is being valued for purposes of a new valuation list. The clause covers matters affecting the physical state of the property, its locality, the nature of its occupation, its use and the use or occupation of other premises situated in the locality. It is intended to make the legislation as clear and explicit as possible to deal with all eventualities, while ensuring relativity and consistency of assessment between business ratepayers. It will also ensure that a revaluation can proceed in 2015, provided that there is a better number of transactions and more consistency in the property market, which I fully expect to be the case. Members will wish to note that the change will not affect the custom and practice that has been adopted at previous revaluations.

Clause 4 of the Bill repeals the rule applied to properties valued by reference to the volume of trade carried out at the property, such as pubs. The change will have the effect of standardising valuations and providing greater consistency of treatment between business sectors. Land and Property Services (LPS) will still be able to take into account any trading evidence that properly helps it determine property values at the valuation date. I stress that clauses 3 and 4 should not impact adversely on the amount that ratepayers have to pay, all other things being equal, and also reflect current custom and practice. The remaining clauses simply deal with the interpretation and commencement of the Bill's provisions.

Having outlined the content of the Bill, I would also like to take the opportunity to advise Members that I will be tabling a ministerial amendment to the Bill. During consultation,

concerns were raised about the impact that empty shops can have on our town centres and shopping areas. Although I have shared those concerns for some years, we have experienced a transformation in the way the retail economy behaves. It seems likely that we face a long and structural oversupply of shops in all our town centres and cities, combined with fierce competition emerging from online retailers.

We need to protect the core of our urban centres from the growing blight of empty shops by keeping them alive. Therefore, I intend to provide a one-year concession during 2012-13 that will effectively allow 50% empty property relief to continue for one year. That change will apply to long-term empty retail properties previously used for the sale of goods or services that become occupied in the next rating year. The property will have to have been empty for at least a year. The measure will go beyond the calls made during the consultation by many who wanted the 50% relief for new businesses to be provided for six months. Having listened to those views, I decided that I want to go much further to help the long-term empty retail premises back into business next year. That is particularly important given the many concerns expressed about declining high streets. Given that this change arose from the consultation, it was not possible to get the detail of the clause finalised before the Bill was introduced.

An amendment will be tabled, and Members will have an opportunity to debate the issue in more detail next Tuesday. This, along with clause 2, is intended to help revitalise our town centres through encouraging and promoting the use of empty shops and getting them back into business. I look forward to the support of the Assembly in taking forward these important measures.

Mr Murphy (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Second Stage of the Bill on behalf of the Committee. As mentioned earlier, the provisions have been brought forward following an intense period of Committee scrutiny and a series of meaningful engagements with key stakeholders in the limited time available.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Minister and his officials for the constructive way in which the Department engaged with the Committee during the consultation process and the development of the proposals that now form the contents of the Bill. The Minister provided a detailed response to the Committee report on the proposed large retail levy and the expansion of the small business rate relief scheme and accepted the majority of the Committee's recommendations.

As outlined by the Minister, the primary purpose of the Bill is to implement a levy on the largest retail premises to fund an expansion of the small business rate relief scheme, which, in turn, will be implemented through the forthcoming subordinate legislation. It is important to recognise at the outset that the provisions in the Bill for a large retail levy are a temporary measure and will be time-limited to 31 March 2015.

Members will be all too aware of the difficulties faced by small businesses across the North at present. Small businesses make a significant contribution to the local economy, providing around 60% of turnover and employment. The intention of the small business rate relief scheme is to alleviate the impact of the rates burden on small businesses and, in turn, help support their growth and sustainability. There was a generally positive response to the aim of supporting small business through the current downturn, including from large retailers.

While supporting the primary aim of providing expanded relief for small business, the Committee was concerned to ensure that there is a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of the existing small business rate relief scheme. The Department responded positively to the Committee's recommendation in that regard and is to initiate an evaluation of the existing scheme in 2012. It will make any necessary changes to the scheme in time for the rates bills in 2012-13.

The Committee welcomes the fact that the valuation will also include consideration of a separate area of potential refinement identified by the Committee: namely, the business case for small industrial units benefiting from both the industrial derating and the small business rate relief scheme under the expanded scheme. The Committee also sought to ensure that businesses that form part of a larger chain do not benefit from the scheme. The Minister is to act on both Committee recommendations and will exclude multiple business premises from the scheme.

It is essential that we have a fair and transparent means of distributing the rates burden in the longer term. The Minister has assured the Committee that the non-domestic rates revaluation, due to take effect in 2015, will rebalance the rating system and that there will no longer be a need for a large retail levy.

The Committee's concern is to ensure that there should be no delay in implementing the 2015 revaluation and that all necessary preparatory work is carried out well in advance so that no gap occurs between the ending of the levy and the revaluation taking effect. An assurance has been provided to the Committee that it will be kept updated regarding the preparatory work being carried out for the 2015 revaluation.

The Committee also notes that the Minister intends to write to the Executive in early April to secure an agreement for revaluation. At its meeting last week, the Committee agreed that I should write to the Department to reinforce the need for revaluation and preparatory work to be carried out in good time. Although supportive of the continued relief for the small business sector, the Committee was keen to ensure that the burden placed on the large retailers was proportionate and equitable.

It has been noted from evidence presented to the Committee that the targeting of the large retail sector alone was the most contentious aspect of the Department's proposals. The levy is to be applied to all retail properties with a rateable value of £500,000 and above. As originally proposed, that would have represented a 20% increase on the rates bills on those properties.

The Committee heard from a number of large retailers and representative organisations on the negative impact of the levy on their businesses. For example, in its evidence, Asda asked whether supermarkets were being targeted because they are keeping their prices down, while utility companies are being rewarded for increasing their prices. Also, B&Q explained that it is liable to pay the levy on all nine of its stores. It claims that the levy will wipe out its profits and

that it would be unable to trade here. It further pointed out that it has no flexibility in the size or location of its stores as it needs large storage space for high-volume, low-cost products, and it also needs large car parks.

Following careful consideration of the evidence, the Committee recommended that the funding burden should be spread more equitably, and identified various options for increasing the number of large business sectors that would fund the expanded business relief scheme. The Committee was of the view that the levy could be widened in a measured way to include some other sectors, including banking and financial institutions and telecoms companies, in years two and three. It was considered that the spreading of the cost of the levy fairly across more large business ratepayers would help to mitigate any risk of the levy being the tipping point that could force individual businesses to make decisions that would have detrimental implications for consumer prices, future investment or employment.

In addition to the other sectors highlighted, the Committee called for the Department to further investigate the option of extending the levy to utility companies. It also requested that the Utility Regulator require utility companies to make efficiency savings rather than passing on additional rate costs to consumers.

The Committee was, therefore, of the view that the various options identified for extending the levy represented a valid compromise and an opportunity to spread the burden in a more measured way. However, the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) did not favour extending the scope of the levy, arguing that it would create uncertainty and would not align well with other Executive policies. It also emphasised that the levy is to apply to large retailers only for the full three years until the end of March 2015.

Following publication of the Committee's report, the Minister announced on 15 December 2011 that the levy would focus on large retailers, but would be reduced from 20% to 15% on average, with the shortfall being paid out of a modest increase in regional rates revenue receipts compared with what was budgeted. I told the Department that that change appears to run counter to previously stated DFP policy and that the expansion of the small business rates relief scheme would be cost-neutral for the Executive. Indeed, the Department's public consultation paper stated that the changes would be redistributive in nature, so there should not be further pressures on the public purse.

In response to the Committee's report, the Department confirmed that there is no scope to prevent utility companies from passing on the cost to consumers under the current price-control arrangements. In addition, DFP stated that any extension of the levy to other selected business sectors with large rateable properties is highly likely to present compliance issues around state aid. The Committee was further assured that this point is not presented as a spoiling tactic for its recommendation for the scope of the levy to be widened. Although I have to take this explanation and assurance at face value, I am mindful that it can be frustrating when state aid is cited as a barrier to new or innovative policy initiatives. In this regard, the Committee has sought a briefing on state aid generally, and may decide to commission research to further inform members' consideration of the issues.

The Committee was also briefed by the Minister on 11 January in relation to the proposed ministerial amendment to the Bill. The amendment, as outlined by the Minister, provides for the continuation of the empty property relief. New occupiers of vacant premises will be entitled to a 50% rebate for 12 months. The Committee received a copy of the proposed amendment in time for last week's meeting, and I can confirm that members support the measure, which will apply for the 2012-13 year only and is intended to get empty shops back into use.

In response to the Minister's briefing on 11 January, the Department also provided clarification on points of detail raised by members, including why the pence-in-the-pound rate for years two and three of the levy is not contained in clause 1 of the Bill.

11.30 am

A Cheann Comhairle, the Committee has, from the outset, been supportive of the need for an intervention to help reduce the disproportionate rating burden borne by small businesses during this exceptionally difficult economic climate, and Committee members have sought to work with the Minister and the Department to achieve the best possible outcome. The Committee will continue to engage with the Department on the ongoing work that arises from the Bill — most importantly on the 2015 revaluation and the review of the effectiveness of the current small business rate relief scheme — in order to ensure that the Assembly and Executive can deal strategically with economic pressures in future. In the meantime, and given the assurances provided by the Department, on behalf of the Committee I support the motion and the general principles of the Bill.

Mr McQuillan: As a member of the Finance and Personnel Committee, I support the Bill and take this opportunity to thank the Minister for coming to Coleraine, listening to local traders and getting their views on the legislation.

Aspects of the Bill originate in the Programme for Government and are intended to ensure fairness in our rates system, as well as to ensure continued assistance for small businesses across our Province. The Bill represents a better deal for the large retail chains and small businesses which are at the heart of our economy.

Clause 1 relates to the additional rates levy on large retail units with a rateable value of over half a million pounds per annum. It applies only to those properties that are occupied and used primarily for retail sales. The levy will cost the retailer an additional 8·52p for every pound of the unit's rateable net annual value. It must be made clear that the additional levy will not be made on those businesses involved in the sale of meals or refreshments prepared to order for immediate consumption elsewhere, or of vehicles; for example, car lots.

The average rates bill of those affected will increase from £440,000 to around £506,000 in 2012-13. Despite much huffing and puffing in the media, large retailers will be 5% better off every year, which, in monetary terms, is £20,000 on average. Such businesses will therefore be £1·5 million better off in total annually. The average levy will be in the region of £66,000 per store, raising around £5 million at 2012-13 levels. That will be a massive boost to Northern Ireland's finances and will improve our financial situation, given the Tory-led Government's cuts to our block grant in

October 2010. To me, this is a Government reacting to the economic crisis and providing leadership in difficult times.

Clause 2 of the Bill will ensure that those unoccupied business units that have a form of window advertising but are not occupied are exempt from rates. That is in many ways a technical change, but it will have a positive impact on the business community. Without it, Land and Property Services would consider the property to be occupied.

Another aspect of the Bill is one that will help small businesses through the small business rate relief scheme. Small businesses are the lifeblood of a community, especially in rural areas. They provide jobs as well as services for the local community. Therefore, they should be supported, and I am pleased that we have a Government that are keen to do that. I am pleased that the current scheme is to be expanded, with 20% rate relief for businesses with net rateable values ranging from £5,001 to £10,000. That means a saving for business totalling £6 million per annum for 8,300 businesses. That represents a much-needed boost in the current economic climate, where business is tough.

I am also pleased that a 50% rate relief scheme will be in place to assist new businesses in their first year of trade. It will seek to breathe new life into town and city centres across the Province, and I am sure that Members are only too aware of the empty shopfronts in the towns that they represent and agree that the scheme will do something to revitalise them. I commend the Bill to the House.

Mr Cree: I also welcome the opportunity to speak to the first Bill that we have had the opportunity to consider during this Assembly's mandate. I commend the First Minister for bringing it forward.

It has undoubtedly taken us a long time to get to the point of considering legislation in the Chamber, and we have been rightly criticised for it. However, today a positive step is taken, and I hope that we will start to see legislation from other Departments flowing through from their respective Committees.

The Finance and Personnel Committee has considered evidence from a wide range of stakeholders over the past few months and has heard a cross section of views in support of and opposition to various aspects of the Rates (Amendment) Bill. However, the Ulster Unionist Party has from the outset been supportive of the rationale of what the Minister is trying to do in the Bill. The rebalancing of business rates is a step towards rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy, which is well documented as being over-reliant on the public sector.

It is essential to do all that we can to ease the burden on small and medium-sized enterprises, which are finding it increasingly difficult to survive. An extension of the small business rate relief scheme will be advantageous in helping those businesses through the economic downturn.

Members of the Ulster Unionist Party fully recognise the difficulties facing small businesses, and we outlined that in our 2011 manifesto and in our proposals for the 2011-15 Programme for Government. In both documents, we underlined our commitment to provide a competitive environment for smaller businesses where they can grow, for example, through reductions in red tape and a review of public procurement processes, to make that market more accessible to small businesses.

The proposals in the Bill would take effect for three financial years, and I broadly agree with that timescale. With regard to the rating of commercial properties, we believe that it is important to retain the ability to react to any changes in the economic environment, given the uncertainty of growth. Three years is a reasonable period to enact changes. However, the rebalancing of our economy is a much more long-term aspiration and requires long-term solutions.

If we are serious about taking a long-term approach to helping our economy, there are two issues that we must also consider aside from what is included in the Rates (Amendment) Bill. First, business improvement districts have the potential to deliver sustainable solutions because they focus on the chief barriers to trade and growth affecting town centres. That is in contrast to business rate relief, which simply redistributes money. Secondly, a re-evaluation of business rates, which is happening in Scotland and Wales, is needed in Northern Ireland. Those issues should be on the Minister's radar, and I believe that they are.

I will now move on to the Bill itself. Clause 1 deals with the levy on the largest retail premises, and I generally have no issues with that. However, I will comment on the definition of "large retail hereditament", which means a hereditament that:

> *"(a) has a rateable net annual value not less than £500,000; and*
>
> *(b) is occupied and used primarily for retail sales".*

As I have stated, we, like most in the House, support the rationale for the Bill, but I have some concerns at this stage that the cost of funding and expansion of the small business rate relief scheme is not spread across a number of large business sectors, rather than just retail. Some larger stores such as B&Q and IKEA have outlined reservations about being able to cope with the increased burden without cutbacks and potential job losses. That, of course, is not ideal.

Clause 2 tackles the issue of empty shops and the negative impact that those have on town and city centres. As has been outlined by other Members, the Bill provides 50% empty property relief where a shop window is used for community or non-commercial means. The Ulster Unionist Party welcomes that as a pragmatic way forward to deal with an increasingly prevalent problem.

Clause 3 clarifies assumptions about rate valuation by being more specific about the matters that should be taken into account when valuing a property for the purposes of a new valuation list. That change will not alter how revaluations are currently conducted, although it is intended to bring about increased clarity and scrutiny, which must be welcomed.

The Finance Committee was clear that the Rates (Amendment) Bill should act alongside other interventions in order to influence the economy positively. That, certainly, is also the view of the Ulster Unionist Party.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Tá áthas orm labhairt ar an ábhar tábhachtach seo.

I am pleased to speak on the general principles of the Bill. The basic principle underlying the Bill is quite straightforward: to help our smaller retailers at a time when their trade is under great pressure from the effects of the recession and to do that by placing a levy on larger retailers with a rateable value of around £500,000. Therefore, you could say that the basic principle behind the Bill is a sound socialist one. I very much welcome that, especially from the present Minister, who is not known for his socialist principles.

In any case, the SDLP recognises the pressure that small retailers are labouring under at the moment and agrees with the Executive on the action that has been taken to alleviate their plight. There is a large degree of political agreement, including from even my learned colleague to my left, that this should be done. As I said, the SDLP agrees with the accelerated passage of the Bill so that the measure will apply in the coming financial year. My colleague Ms Ritchie did, I think, raise some relevant points in that debate, none of which contradicted the point that I had put forward. The Minister took the opportunity to do his "Sammy Wilson at the Apollo" act in response to that. That act has been honed and is gradually improving.

The measure is a short-term measure; we could almost call it an emergency measure. It is being afforded accelerated passage through the House so that hard-pressed retailers can be helped as quickly as possible under the present economic circumstances. There may, indeed, be better ways of bringing relief to small retailers in the longer term, but those would take some time to be brought forward under the existing rating system. A rating review is planned, and perhaps that will afford the opportunity to hone a more accurate instrument in the future.

Much of the criticism of the Bill has come, I suppose not surprisingly, from the larger retailers, which operate 77 or so premises that will be subject to the larger levy. One of their criticisms is that other large businesses with smaller outlets, like banks, for example, will escape the levy. The Chairman of the Committee has referred to that. Although that is a true and valid criticism, I am happy that the Minister and the Department have promised to look at that aspect of the Bill. I am sure that the Minister will have something to say about that particular issue when he sums up.

Many of the larger retailers have expressed the view that business improvement districts, or BIDs, would be a more effective way of helping to regenerate town centres, and have expressed their willingness to participate in and contribute to such an approach. That, of course, is to be welcomed. BIDs may well prove to be a more effective way of helping town centres and smaller retailers. However, under the present circumstances, the relief is needed quickly, and I believe that the Bill will attempt to deliver that relief in the next financial year. The Department for Social Development is bringing forward legislation on BIDs. It will be interesting to see what measures it brings forward to help smaller retailers.

There has been criticism of the actual amount of eventual relief that smaller retailers will gain from the legislation. The estimates are around £750 to £1,000. Many people say that such a sum would not save a business that is teetering on the brink of closure. That may well be true in some cases, but, to use the slogan of one of the Minister's friends, "every little helps" under the circumstances.

I believe that the principle of helping smaller retailers is widely supported across the range of stakeholders. Although they may disagree on the means to the end, it is good to see a general positive attitude in this direction. That is something that can be built upon for the future.

Critics of the Bill will welcome the fact that the measure is time-limited by a sunset clause, which will bring it to a conclusion in March 2015. In the interim, the duration of the measure affords us the opportunity to begin the process of rating review and, as I said earlier, to shape an instrument that may be more effective in helping smaller businesses in the future.

11.45 am

In conclusion, I believe that the positive effect of the Bill in helping more than 8,000 small businesses should be welcomed. I hope the effects of the Bill will help to alleviate the plight of small retailers and ensure that they survive the economic downturn. I support the Bill. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mrs Cochrane: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the Bill, as brought forward by the Minister, and to discuss the principles outlined therein. I appreciate that, before now, Members were concerned about the implications of the Bill and that a range of opinions and suggestions was offered in order to accommodate a variety of interests. However, if the primary purpose of the Bill is, as stated, to alleviate economic pressures in a timely manner, then it deserves appropriate consideration by the House.

As discussed this morning, the Bill provides primarily for a supplementary regional rate to be levied on selected large retailers in order to fund an extended level of rate relief for small businesses. Additional funds for local and small businesses should be welcomed at a time when our economy is in need of renewed financial impetus. The manner in which the extra funding will be accrued, namely at a cost to only our large retailers, remains open to question, especially given the range of recommendations brought to the Minister by the Committee for Finance and Personnel. Nevertheless, the intent and end goal of such measures cannot be overlooked, and the extension of the small business rate relief scheme is undeniably worthy of merit.

In addition to the extension of the rate relief scheme, another significant provision in the Bill is the revised rating criteria that it proposes for unoccupied properties. That is particularly significant, given the number of vacant units currently evidenced in towns and cities across Northern Ireland. The revised criteria for window displays and the proposed ministerial amendment, which was referred to earlier, provide a renewed impetus for areas suffering from the ill effects of vacant units and the negative connotations they impose on other traders and businesses in the neighbouring area. That is a growing problem in my constituency of East Belfast, particularly in the area surrounding my constituency office, and I appreciate the recognition from the Minister that addressing vacant units can play a vital role in the regeneration of such areas. I hope that that is something that can be built on further in the near future.

Further detail found in the Bill and its supporting documentation estimates that the financial effects of the changes will give rise to marginal additional costs. That,

too, should be viewed in a positive light. When we consider the minimal financial cost relating to the implementation of the Bill, the favourable conclusion of the regulatory impact assessment and, notably, the positive results of the equality impact assessment, in accordance with our section 75 obligations, we see that there is little within those aspects of the Bill to warrant a critical response.

In recent meetings that I had with commercial banking representatives and SME facilitators in east Belfast, it was interesting to note that, in the current climate, the impact and availability of additional rate relief does not seem to be a priority concern in new business planning. Whether that is due to lack of awareness or to the notion that the level of the relief is considered inconsequential, I am not sure. Regardless of their nature, we cannot fail to recognise the efforts of the Minister to provide additional financial support in tough economic times.

Further to points touched upon today and to discussions held over the course of the Finance and Personnel Committee's consideration of the initial proposals, suggestions for change and requests for amendments may be forthcoming when the Bill reaches its Consideration Stage. Keeping that in mind, I offer my support for the principles and objectives of the Bill.

Mr Girvan: I speak as a member of the Finance Committee. In doing so, I think that it is imperative that we see the danger of not reacting to the financial crisis in our retail and town centres. I believe that the Bill, as presented, will go some way in helping to deliver some benefits to the areas greatly affected.

I met a number of retailers who, this time last year, were making exactly the same comments about the rate relief programme, which gave them a 20% rates reduction on properties that were under £5,000 of rateable value. Unfortunately, they believed that that did not go far enough for high street properties. So, the move to help small business by doubling that level to £10,000 will have an impact. An additional 8,300 businesses will take advantage of the change in the coming year. I appreciate that the change is not just for this year; it will be in effect for the next three years.

The number of vacant properties on our high streets has been touched on. Unfortunately, every town seems to be blighted by empty shops and empty shop windows. The Bill makes provision for properties that have been vacant for one year, giving new businesses the advantage of a 50% reduction on the rates for those properties for one year. I encourage that. The Bill will help those who are teetering on the edge of making a decision about starting a business because of the extra cost. At least, those people will have the opportunity to see how things go and, ultimately, their businesses may fill up some of the redundant windows in our towns.

The provision for advertisement and allowing shop windows to be used is welcome. There is nothing worse than driving down a high street and seeing a row of empty windows. It is important that our high street shop windows are used for some form of retail. However, there is always one problem; in this case, it is the levy for large retailers.

Representatives of the large retailers made presentations to the Committee. The draft Bill included a 20% levy for large retailers. However, in light of some of the evidence that was received, there has been movement, and the levy has dropped down to 15%. We are glad to see that. The 15% levy, as opposed to 20%, equates to an average saving of somewhere in the region of £20,000.

There are a number of areas that we need to look at. Some people said that the large retailers would go out of business. A number of those retailers have made a lot of money over a lot of years. I appreciate that the 15% levy will bring back £5 million to the Executive, which will help to fund the small business rate relief scheme.

As the Minister said, Waitrose, another large retailer, has declared an interest in opening stores here, irrespective of whether we go ahead with this or not. I appreciate that Waitrose is showing a willingness to invest in Northern Ireland.

This Bill warrants the support of the Assembly. We should appreciate that this is only its Second Stage; there are other stages to go through to ensure that we get it through prior to the March implementation of the bills going out to properties. Any business, irrespective of its balance sheet, can take the advantage and reinvest, whatever that difference might be. There will be £750 to £1,000 savings for some small retailers. They will reinvest that money in their businesses. Some of those small businesses said to us that they worked last year for no profit. We are not talking about billions of pounds of profit, we are talking about no profit. Those businesses just managed to cover their overheads, and the Executive should offer any help they can to them. The Bill shows that this Assembly has reacted to the concerns that were brought to the electorate and those who represent our town centres.

I support the Bill with pleasure. I hope and pray that we can get it pushed through. There are those who say that we are pushing it through, but there are time constraints, and it is important that we react to that and get it dealt with as quickly as possible.

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

Mr Humphrey: As a member of the Finance Committee, I, too, speak in support of the Bill. Throughout the process over the past number of months since I was appointed to the Committee, I have been taking part in informal consultation with traders in Belfast in my constituency and the greater Shankill area, as well as in the city centre through the Belfast City Centre Management Company and the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau.

Each member of the Finance Committee and, indeed, all Members will, I am sure, have been contacted through their constituency offices about the issues. I also had the opportunity to speak to large retailers at Committee and in my constituency office, and I understand Members' concerns and fears about the Bill's accelerated passage, a process that the Minister explained. For many years, unionists in particular had complaints and concerns about the guillotine process of the Order in Council at Westminster, so I understand those concerns. However, the Bill is about local government delivering for local people and local traders. The Assembly must be seen to be responsive in dealing with the prevailing economic situation in Northern Ireland and throughout the United Kingdom. In that context, accelerated passage is, in my view, appropriate.

Mr Allister and others mentioned the consultation process. Of course, my party has grave concerns not only about the time that the process takes but about the cost of the consultation itself, research, production of publications, sending out executive summaries and then the full publications on glossy paper and, of course, the postage. Those costs apply across all Departments, but look at what opportunities could be created if that money went elsewhere, not to mention the time taken and wasted.

Government here must be responsive, and I think that the Minister of Finance and Personnel has been responsive and responsible. Just as the Committee consulted extensively, so did the Minister. We heard about his tour of Northern Ireland, and I also praise him for meeting the Belfast Chamber of Commerce and Belfast City Centre Management Company to address the issues of traders in the centre of Belfast. I understand that more Members do not represent Belfast than do, but Belfast is the tourism and transport hub of Northern Ireland, and it is important that, as the capital city, it is taken into consideration. That is why there was wide consultation with the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association (NIIRTA), the Federation of Small Businesses, Pubs of Ulster and the large retail sector. As pointed out by Mr Girvan and at Committee, it is important for traders to move from a negative position to normal profit. The scheme will provide a salary for some traders who currently do not receive one; a man who gave evidence to the Committee made that point. The income from the large retail scheme will be £5 million, which will be used to offset the cost, which is about £6 million, of the small business rate relief scheme.

I think that we must, at the same time, take into consideration the concerns, as Mr Cree mentioned, of B&Q and IKEA. However, those large retailers must remember that business can be cyclical, as I know from working in the private sector for 16 years. There was a time when large retailers had it good. Many, particularly in border towns, still have it very, very good; and, of course, the Republic of Ireland's increase in VAT to 23% will provide a huge boost to their business. The next number of months will show that to be the case.

It is important that we in Northern Ireland are fit for purpose and do all that we can to ensure that business are strong, fit and able to deal with the issues arising from the prevailing economic climate. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that we are dealing with one of the worst economic situations in the world since the 1930s, and it must be remembered that a lot of our trade is with countries in a euro zone on the verge of collapse.

People will accuse you of being irresponsible for saying that, but it is a fact. If a country like France loses its AAA status, there is a serious issue in the euro zone, not to mention the issues in Spain, Italy, Greece and, of course, the Republic, our nearest neighbour. The truth of the matter is that we have to do all we can to ensure that our businesses are fit for purpose.

12.00 noon

With regard to the large business relief scheme, every member of the Committee who met those people understood the pain that this will have for their businesses. However, the truth is that we cannot simply sit and do nothing. Our towns and city centres need to be rejuvenated. Past Times and Peacocks are going into administration, following others who have gone down that route.

This action will be connected with those that local councils will take. I pay particular tribute to Dungannon council for its empty shop project, improving the frontage of shops that are disused or derelict. That is hugely important to our small towns. Equally important, particularly in our larger towns, is the proposal for business improvement districts. They will allow our towns and cities to be seen as vibrant, open for business and the heartbeat of the community.

Tourism is hugely important for Northern Ireland. Therefore, it is important that we have events such as the large one in London last week, when the First Minister and deputy First Minister were selling Northern Ireland plc and trying to get people to come here because this year we have the Titanic centenary. In the next number of years, however, we have lots of things: Londonderry City of Culture and, of course, others that will roll out. We have got to be out there, selling Northern Ireland plc as a place to visit and a place for foreign direct investment but also as a place to shop locally and a place to shop if you are coming across the border. There is clear evidence in Belfast and in out-of-town shopping centres around Belfast of Southern shoppers coming to Northern Ireland and spending money here.

As I said, we do not have control over fiscal policy. That resides at Westminster. As a unionist and someone who believes in continuing to strengthen the union, I believe in parity. However, fiscal policy here is limited in terms of rates. The rate relief scheme will help. It is not a panacea, but it will help business and local traders as they face the most difficult of times, with some facing closure. We heard that directly in evidence to the Committee. Therefore, I hope the Bill receives support across the House. The Bill is about local government responding to local concerns, local fears, local people and local businesses and delivering for them and helping them in their business and maintaining Northern Ireland through a very difficult period.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for bringing forward the Bill. First, I acknowledge the arguments that have been made about accelerated passage. I listened to some Members indicate strongly why the Bill should have accelerated passage. Some of those arguments, though, could be made for every piece of legislation: the cost of consultation, the amount of consultation, how long that goes on for and the time that is spent doing it. That argument could be used in a lot of other cases and not for just this Bill. We need to look at whether this legislation is fair and reasonable. Will it do what it is meant to do? Will it bring about the results that we hope for?

I listened intently to the Member for North Belfast. He will appreciate that I do not agree with his over-reliance on Belfast. There is much more to Northern Ireland than Belfast. I hope that the vast majority of Members appreciate that as well. All parts of Northern Ireland contribute significantly. I want to see many of the smaller retailers getting the benefit of what we achieve in the Chamber.

A number of businesses and town centre managements would disagree with what the Member for North Belfast said about many of them still doing very well out of cross-border shopping. That is relevant to some of the larger out-of-town

retail stores, but not all of the town centres, especially those around the border, do well out of cross-border shopping. In fact, quite recently, four businesses in one town in my constituency closed within one week. That is a practical example of how difficult it is for businesses at this time.

I would like the Minister to clarify the specifics of the extension to the rate relief scheme and how it will apply to each business. One retailer indicated that the relief would only bring around £730 per annum to around 9,000 small businesses. I wonder what the Minister's opinion is of that figure. I assume that he indicates something different. There was an earlier indication of a 20% levy on large retail stores, which has now been reduced to 15%. I assume that that 5% difference will come from public spend and that other businesses or opportunities in Northern Ireland may lose out because of that 5% reduction. I would appreciate some detail on that aspect.

It might also be a good opportunity for the Minister to outline some of the details of the regional rates and where exactly they are spent. Many of us who have served in local government appreciate that each and every pound that is spent on the district rates is accounted for in the local rate base. Many see the regional rate as just a regional taxation for Northern Ireland; there is no real explanation of where exactly it is spent. I know that it is very difficult because you still have some reserved matters that it goes towards as well, but it would be a useful exercise to, at some stage, give a further explanation of that.

I appreciate the difficulties for small businesses. I hear what the large retailers say, but not as many of them go to the wall as small businesses. We must protect them. I am very focused on protecting the regional towns and market towns and the centres of Belfast and other cities in Northern Ireland. That is why it is vital that we protect them and provide any practical assistance that we can in a manner that will not overly discriminate or cause hardship for the businesses and multiples that make significant amounts of money. Although I appreciate that this is only one of the measures that may help in the current economic climate, I accept that, hopefully, it will go some way to rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy.

Mr Hilditch: I support the Bill as presented, and I welcome the accelerated passage afforded to it today.

The Assembly must react to the economic climate in which we find ourselves. We need to support our existing small businesses and encourage any potential new small business by the introduction of the Rates (Amendment) Bill and any forthcoming initiatives that go with it. The economic downturn has been difficult for a range of sectors, but it has hit our small businesses particularly hard. When walking through towns in my constituency of East Antrim, such as Larne and Carrickfergus, I find its effects very visible and very worrying. Other Departments are working on master planning for our provincial towns, with streetscapes and public realm schemes. However, if closure rates continue, particularly in the retail sector, those planned works will not matter too much. Although the Bill will not resolve the problem, it can take a small but meaningful and significant step towards trying to sustain town centres. In particular, where larger retailers have been sucking the blood out of town centres, it is time to put something back. Hopefully, the sacrifice made by larger businesses is understood on one hand and appreciated on the other.

Although this is the Second Stage of the Bill, there has been fairly substantial consultation and, indeed, public debate on it over the past few months. Hopefully, now, everyone has had their say, drawn conclusions and formed opinions. It is known that more than 98% of businesses in Northern Ireland employ fewer than 50 people. That is just less than half of the number of businesses that are registered for VAT purposes as having a turnover of less than £100,000. Therefore, small businesses are a crucial sector in the economy. Their contributions are vital to development in communities and will drive and support employment growth.

The additional support that any future expanded small business rate relief scheme is offering is around £6 million per year. There is no doubt that that will go some way towards helping the quoted 8,000 businesses in 2012-13. In Carrickfergus, where I am based, it is estimated that more than 300 small businesses in the borough will be beneficiaries of the scheme. That is an estimated 50% increase in Carrickfergus and, likewise, in Larne.

The large retail levy will affect, as the Minister has indicated with updated figures, 23 companies with 75 properties. Obviously, that includes Asda, Sainsbury's, Tesco and other department stores. The average rates bill of those affected will be £66,000, as we have already heard. To put that into perspective, one large retailer — Tesco, I believe — was listed as having a £24·4 billion market capitalisation as of 15 January 2012. Therefore, £66,000 per annum can, surely, be absorbed by the multinational company over the three-year period. Indeed, many would already have been paying substantially more had rates review taken place before now. We appreciate and acknowledge the importance of multinationals to Northern Ireland's economy and the positive impact that they have had on employment, and we want to continue to support their growth and sustainability. However, we would struggle to say that large businesses are in the same vulnerable position as small businesses.

Ten years ago, you would probably have had to travel some distance to find a Tesco, Sainsbury's or Asda. Now, they have at least one large retail unit in virtually every provincial town. If you take a walk through most town centres today, you will find it difficult to say that they need another multinational. The evidence is clear from the boarded-up shops, derelict buildings and smaller retail outlets. Businesses are required in those centres. That is why my party welcomes clause 2. Even aesthetics would be improved by its provisions on shop windows and frontages.

Businesses, such as coffee outlets, shops, offices, restaurants and community facilities add footfall, vitality and liveliness. Improving the built environment and retail outlets in towns would attract a greater number of visitors and tourists to spend money in communities. The Rates (Amendment) Bill is a small but important step to try to help the sector. It is for those reasons that I urge the Assembly to support the Bill. My party is not saying that the Bill will rectify the problems faced. However, it will be an important step towards addressing the cost base and the very survival of the small business and retail sectors.

Many good points have been highlighted and arguments made with regard to the scheme's boundaries and which

businesses should be included and which should not. Lines have to be drawn somewhere. The scheme has reached the best balance possible at this stage. I welcome the Bill, and I look forward to the Minister's response.

Mr Allister: It has been an interesting debate, both because of things that were intended to be said and some that were not. Unless I misheard Mr Cree, I noticed that he thanked the First Minister for introducing the Bill. I know that there is, apparently, a new dawn of co-operation between the Ulster Unionist Party and the DUP. However, unless Mr Cree knows something that the rest of us or, certainly, some of us do not, it was an interesting observation. I also noted that it very quickly brought the present First Minister right into the Chamber to stamp out any such seditious suggestion. When the ship was settled, he left again.

12.15 pm

With regard to the principles of the Bill, part of the justification for this approach is to bring greater equity and balance to our rating system and to recognise the undoubted reality that many of our town centre businesses are being crippled by rates. Their customers have to put up with town centre car parking charges, whereas large out-of-town retailers have benefits in terms of what looks like paying less in rates pro rata, and, very often, they have the benefit of free car parking. So it is suggested in the Bill that we can do something to right the balance somewhat in that regard. To an extent, that may be true, but the real tool in rating for dealing with imbalance and bringing equity is the mechanism of a general revaluation. Yet, that is something that we have not had since 2003 and will not have until 2015, not because of the actions of some wicked, slothful direct rule Minister who does not care about the imbalance in the rating structure but because of the actions of the Executive in postponing a general revaluation of rates. In doing that, they perpetuate the inequities that are now said to justify the bringing forward in part of this proposition. Rather than grasping the nettle and dealing properly, adequately and fully with the inequities that afflict our rating system through embracing a general revaluation, they do the very opposite. They put it off, thereby perpetuating the fact that many local retail stores in town centres are being unduly put upon in contrast to others. So it is important that we identify that issue.

Of course, it is compounded in Northern Ireland by the fact that we do not have interim revaluations based on a change of circumstances. Elsewhere in the United Kingdom, you can make an application from the last valuation and make a case, and, if you succeed, you can have your rates adjusted. You cannot do that here. That is a further inequity and one that the Executive could have addressed in legislation, be it accelerated or slow legislation. They have chosen not to address it at all.

One has to ask why the Executive have shied away from the obvious due process in addressing rate inequities through a general revaluation. The answer is probably finance-driven. They are quite happy to exploit the fact that businesses are being over-rated because it helps the infill into the coffers. They are quite happy to have valuations based on values that may no longer be in keeping with current commercial valuations, and they are quite happy to reap the benefits of that. In so doing, they do a great disservice to businesses and householders in this community. It is in that context, therefore, that one has to measure the sincerity and authenticity of the protestations about a desire to help businesses and households through tough times. Why has it not been done through a proper revaluation, which, I suspect, ought to have been done?

Instead, we now have a Bill with some stopgap measures to try to bring some balance where there is none. The main target, of course, is big retail business, be it out of town or not; mostly, undoubtedly, it is out of town. I detect something of a contradiction in that. I am not a big supporter of huge business, but it has its place. It creates and devotes a great, valuable contribution to our society. However, we all stand aghast at times when we see the profit levels that it reports and the bonuses that it pays. It is hard for consumers to be friendly towards it, but it has its place. As I said, I detect something of a contradiction between, as it would see it, the crusade against big business — I think that that is overstating it — putting extra rates on it and the Executive's head-over-heels approach to corporation tax reform. That, of course, is designed specifically and exclusively not to help small business, the struggling shopkeeper in the high street or the corner shop owner but to help big business and to attract more big business. The Finance Minister may not be the greatest supporter of that on the Executive. He may occasionally ask proper, sceptical, searching questions about the proposition. However, the Executive as a whole have no room for scepticism or questions about the wisdom of that. They are head over heels in favour of corporation tax reform but send out a very different message on rates. That message is this: we are the friend of big business on corporation tax, but, when it comes to rates, we want to soak them a little more. I detect a contradiction in that that has never been properly explained.

Then there is the issue of what the extra levy will bring in, which, we suddenly discover, will be very modest indeed. It is but £5 million, we are told. In financial spend terms, £5 million is very small beer indeed for the Assembly. The Assembly spends £5 million a year on spin doctors. When I say "the Assembly", I mean the Assembly and the Executive. The Assembly funds an organisation, Invest NI, that can spend £200 a plate on a night out to hear Van Morrison. Last week, the Finance Minister told the Assembly that he had £40 million to spare and that Departments were looking for only £20 million of it. The Assembly spends £100 million every four years on useless North/South bodies. Therefore, suddenly discovering, in the context of what I have described, that the levy is an imperative prerequisite for helping small business to garner £5 million from big business seems quite a tall story. Last week, the Finance Minister was happily able to find £120 million down the back of a sofa somewhere for education. Good. I do not buy the propaganda that, without the levy, we could not and would not help those who need help: small businesses. The Executive could readily help small businesses without the levy, and they know it. I am a little sceptical about some of the motivation for all this.

I want to turn to some other issues in the Bill. The Bill will be applied on an all-or-nothing basis to companies with an NAV of over £500,000. That is the cut-off or kick-off point for the extra tax. Therefore, companies with an NAV of £495,000 will breathe a sigh of relief, while companies with an NAV of £500,000 will pay — what is it? — an extra £43,000 a year. Companies with an NAV of £1 million or

£1·5 million will pay proportionately more on the basis of 8·5p in the pound. Why is there no graduation or scale in the Bill that might allow for a lesser commencement figure and a higher ultimate figure? If we want to bring equity to the playing field, could that not have been done? Maybe there is an explanation for that. I have not heard it today, but, if there is an explanation, no doubt we will hear it.

We also discover that the Bill will apply to retail only but not to all retail. Why is that? Why, for example, are companies that sell vehicles excluded? If I drive my car up the M1, I will pass Makro on my right-hand side. I do not know what the NAV of that business is, but, even if it is over £500,000, it will escape the levy because it is a wholesaler and not a retailer. If I pass a large, sprawling vehicle-selling centre, it will also be exempt from the levy, whatever its NAV. Why? If I pass Marks and Spencer or another store at Sprucefield, it will be included in the levy. Why? Why is it a levy for some and not for all? Why will some retailers in some categories be excluded? Again, interesting though the debate has been, I have not heard an explanation of that.

One thing that is clear — it causes me some unease — is that the Bill offers no certainty beyond the first year. We know that the additional regional rate of 8·52p in the pound will be charged in the upcoming financial year. We also know that something will be charged in the next year and in the year after that, but we do not know what that will be. That will be decided by secondary legislation at some point in the future, possibly by a different Minister. I would have thought that the business community wants certainty and to know what it has to budget for. The Bill tells business what it has to budget for next year. Why does it not tell it what it has to budget for in the following two years? We are assured that that will be temporary, but we have all heard those assurances before. My goodness, mandatory coalition was supposed to be temporary, but everyone in the House knows that it is here for as long as those who prop it up choose to prop it up.

12.30 pm

I suspect that the levy could remain for longer than the three years. That would, of course, require further primary legislation, but within the second and third year, further secondary legislation is not required. At a whim, almost, subject to the affirmative resolution process, a Minister could decide to increase the amount of the levy or revisit, redraft or totally recast the definitions section of the Bill. It is surprising that primary legislation is passed that sets out key definitions in clause 1 — what would be the new article 7A(3) of the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977 — of what is a large retail hereditament and of what is retail sales and sale of goods, etc, and then slips in at new paragraph (4) that:

> *"The Department may by an order which is made subject to affirmative resolution modify paragraph (3)."*

So those definitions are not worth a lot if, in the future, without primary legislation, they can be revisited and recast. Why is that necessary in this Bill? Why are we not even allowing that degree of certainty, so that we can have a situation where, next year, the NAV might not be £500,000, but could be £400,000 or £700,000? Who knows? It is because the power exists, in the proposed paragraph (4), to amend that by secondary legislation. Is that a good way to proceed with primary legislation such as this?

No doubt we will be told that it is, but I am uncomfortable with the blank cheque approach that the Bill embraces.

Mr Hamilton: In developing this latest contradiction in his argument, the Member has described the Bill's provisions as a blank cheque. Having, it seems, read the Bill, has he not taken note of the fact that it says that further changes can be made only by way of affirmative resolution, and that, therefore, it is not a blank cheque? Indeed, if any amendments are tabled they must come before the House and be voted on by all Members, including himself.

Mr Allister: I was careful to read from the Bill about affirmative resolution. Of course I know that. *[Interruption.]* Sorry?

Mr Hamilton: It is not a blank cheque.

Mr Allister: It is a blank cheque in that it is a departure from the route of primary legislation. It is saying to the Minister, you, by secondary legislation, can have another go at the Bill and change its framework. You can change the NAV and who is in and who is out; you can do all that by secondary legislation. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Blank cheque or no blank cheque, all remarks must be made through the Chair.

Lord Morrow: I have listened with interest to what the Member has been saying. In keeping with his attitude on other things, he is quite critical. I suspect that, if the Executive were to give gold diamonds to businesses today, Mr Allister would be critical of it and would say it should be silver or something like that.

He has come out with much criticism and he feels that a different route should have been taken. During the consultation period that was available to us to hear all these things, how many ideas did he put forward in his submissions? How did he give the Executive, the Minister of Finance and Personnel and the Department of Finance and Personnel the benefit of his wisdom on this issue? Can he catalogue for us, in some detail — I know that he is a man for detail — his submissions on the Bill during the consultation period? Will he accept that, when we are talking about rates, there are others who can play a role?

For instance, Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council, which strikes a part of the rate, has had a zero rate increase for the past two years. I advise him to watch the space in Dungannon to see what will happen in the third year. Is there not an example there?

Mr Allister: I am sure that there is, but I am sure that those who are affected by that will be echoing the point that that is good and gives us certainty until the Bill comes along. The Bill introduces uncertainty; we know that, next year, there will be an extra 8·5p in the pound, but we have no idea of what it will be in the years after that. Although Dungannon council may have been very good in giving stability and certainty to its traders in that regard and is being commended for it, we have no control over what DFP does.

Being a Member of the House gives me the advantage of making a point about the response to the consultation. If we were in the non-accelerated process, there would also be the opportunity to properly table and debate amendments.

There would also be the opportunity for the Minister to respond and to reflect on issues made, but, because —

Mr Weir: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: In a moment. Because we have truncated all of that and decided that we are going down the fast route on this, we are not looking for alteration, improvement and amendment. They know best. If Lord Morrow thinks that the Executive would have listened to one word that Jim Allister would have said, he is even more naive than I thought. One knows that that might be the surest way to ensure that it was not listened to.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. He does himself a disservice by saying that Lord Morrow and others would simply ignore his words. I appreciate that the Member is relatively new to this institution, but I would have thought that he should realise that accelerated passage does not cut out the opportunity for any amendments, and, indeed, I am sure that we look forward to whatever amendments he wishes to table. Accelerated passage simply removes Committee scrutiny and, indeed, ensures that scrutiny is on the Floor of the Chamber. The Member is wrong if he says that accelerated passage precludes amendments in some way.

Mr Allister: It excludes line-by-line consideration of the Bill, which is the Committee Stage. The Member can dance around the issue as much as he likes, perhaps imbued by a certain embarrassment that he is a party to the short-circuiting of a process. It abrogates entirely the Committee Stage of the Bill, and that is where it removes the line-by-line examination of the Bill.

Lord Morrow: Mr Allister, every time you speak, you come across as a very generous man. Surely, as a public representative, you have a social conscience. You have poured out issues that you feel would enhance the Bill immensely. Is it not reasonable to say that you should have put those forward in the consultation period? You could then have got up and said with some authority and credibility that you had put up reasonable suggestions that the Executive did not listen to. You cannot say that, or can you? I suspect that you will say that.

Mr Allister: I can say —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I must remind Members that interventions should be really short. Also, I have to tell Members that, if Mr Allister is not finished by 12.45 pm, I will have to suspend the meeting. That is not because he has been speaking but because a Business Committee meeting is taking place.

Mr Allister: Mr Deputy Speaker, you will understand that they keep interrupting me. On Lord Morrow's point, I have had lots of experience where my advice has been unceremoniously rejected, and I have no doubt that it will be no different in this case.

Speeches at Second Stage should be on the principle of the Bill, but, if we are not to have line-by-line scrutiny, I wish to elucidate from the Minister some information relating to clause 2.

That is the one that refers to window displays. A bit like the Executive, the pretence is that work is ongoing but the reality is very different. What will become paragraph 9(2)(b) tells us about the conditions, to which I referred earlier, that restrict or set the parameters of those window displays, stating:

> *"the window display is not for the purposes of, and does not identify, a trade or business".*

I struggle to understand the intention of that. Does that mean identify a trade or business in the generic sense of any trade or business? Or is it intended to be focused on not identifying a trade or business in a specific sense? If, for example, those well-known milliners "S Wilson's" who sell handbags had a shop and part of their premises next door was vacant, and they want to put a display in its window, were they to put a display of handbags, hats or whatever —

Mr Hamilton: That is what a milliner would do.

Mr Allister: Yes. If they put a display of handbags or hats, because they are identifying that window with a trade or business in the drapery line — as a milliner or whatever — are they offending that clause? Or would that only be the case if they put something that specifically identifies their business, S Wilson's? That is a serious enough point when it comes to the interpretation of the Bill. It is the sort of point that would have been teased out in a line-by-line examination of the Bill. Therefore, at this peculiar Second Stage, one is entitled to ask what the clause means when it says that a display shall:

> *"not identify, a trade or business".*

If it is meant to be the specific trade or business that owns the window, is the wording adequate to cover that? I will be interested to hear what the Minister will say about that.

The preceding head contains the arbitrary declaration that the:

> *"window display does not exceed 5 per cent. of the floor area".*

What is the nexus between those two? What is the thinking behind stating that your window display must not be more than 5% of your unseen floor area? Where is the logic or the reason for that? What is the source of it? For any legislation to be good, it needs sensible justification for the detail that is in it. Certainly, I have heard nothing to indicate the logic or source of that provision. That is the sort of detail that it would have been useful to have the opportunity to explore.

Finally, you will be glad to hear, the Minister mentioned a new clause, which I have not seen. I think that he said that it would carry forward a 50% rebate for the year in which premises are reoccupied. However, if I understood him correctly, that rebate would be restricted to retail. Why restrict it to retail? There are many empty office premises up and down Northern Ireland. If I understood the amendment correctly, why are they excluded? Is there a compelling reason for that? I will be interested to hear it.

12.45 pm

I trust that I have not tried the patience of the House too much. I return to the fundamental point that revaluation is the proper way to bring equity to the rating system. If large out-of-town centres are paying too little per square foot and town centre retailers are paying too much, as they undoubtedly are, is revaluation not the proper way to do that

so that there is a long-term — or a longer-term — equity to the situation?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately on the lunchtime suspension. I propose therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.45 pm.

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

2.01 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Regional Development

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Apologies.

Translink: Fares

1. **Mr G Kelly** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there are any plans to increase Translink passenger fares in the near future. *(AQO 1122/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Mr Deputy Speaker, I never thought that I would be in a position to welcome your presence. *[Laughter.]*

I thank the Member for his question. Translink produces a rolling three-year corporate plan each year that must be approved by the Department. It normally focuses on the plan for the year ahead, taking account of cost pressures as well as revenue support from the Department and income projections. Fare levels will be a key element of the discussion. The plan is discussed with my Department as well as with the Regional Development Committee and the Consumer Council before finalisation. The process is ongoing.

Recent financial plans have helped ensure that fare increases are kept to a minimum. The last Translink general passenger fares increase was in June 2010. The current fares freeze on bus and rail services in Northern Ireland will continue until at least the end of the current financial year. That has benefited large numbers of passengers using bus and rail services in a period of economic hardship. As far as I am aware, that has not been the case elsewhere in the United Kingdom or, indeed, the Republic of Ireland.

Discussions with Translink regarding its financial plans for the next financial year continue. Although I cannot give any specific assurances about the position that will apply for the next financial year, I can assure you that I will endeavour to keep fares to a minimum for the consumer.

Mr G Kelly: Go raibh maith agat le haghaidh an fhreagra sin. Thanks very much to the Minister for that answer. Although he said that he cannot guarantee what the fares might be, he also said that he will try to keep them to a minimum. If there are increases, can we get a guarantee that the service will increase? Routes have been taken off and services made less frequent in some places in the Translink system.

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. Those issues are, of course, primarily for Translink. Fare increases are always a last resort, but it is important to recognise the financial pressures facing Translink. In broad terms, we expect Translink to prepare plans that meet all its financial pressures and enable it to break even financially across Northern Ireland Railways, Metro, Ulsterbus and the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company.

Translink remains a public corporation whose financial pressures are my responsibility. However, it would not be in the best interests of the consumer or the taxpayer for a financial plan to be agreed that could lead to major financial difficulties in the organisation. Indeed, Translink retains company status, and there are responsibilities as a direct result.

Mr Campbell: The Minister will be aware of the increasingly high cost of private car ownership and the cost of unleaded fuel and diesel. Setting the cost to the private motorist to one side, that opens up opportunities for Translink to focus on special offers to get people using trains and buses. I know that there is some linkage between Belfast and the north coast in that regard. Will he ensure that Translink will heavily promote those specially discounted fares in order to get people on to public transport?

Mr Kennedy: Yes.

Mr Nesbitt: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. This is very good exercise. I welcome the Minister's commitment that, if fares have to go up, they will be kept to "a minimum". Will he assure the House that such an increase would be below the level of inflation?

Mr Kennedy: As I indicated, any fare increase is always a last resort. If it were found to be necessary, I would want to keep those fares to an absolute minimum, which would involve looking at rates of inflation.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. What work is the Department doing with the education and library boards with a view to keeping the cost of school transport down and affordable?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. Those issues are for Translink to carry forward, but I am aware that it is having discussions with the education authorities. I encourage that because there are competing financial pressures on education and library boards as well as on Translink. Finding a way forward by working together seems to be a very good thing.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before we move on, I advise Members that questions 4, 7 and 9 have been withdrawn and will require written answers.

A24: Ballynahinch Bypass

2. **Mr McCallister** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposals for the Ballynahinch bypass. *(AQO 1123/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: Roads Service has advised that a preliminary options report for the A24 Ballynahinch bypass proposal was published in 2009. Subsequently, work has been taken forward to identify a preferred route for the scheme. Three possible lines for a bypass on the eastern side of Ballynahinch are being considered. Those lines reflect the line included in the Ards and Down area plan, and were the subject of a public exhibition and consultation event held in the town in November 2009.

Roads Service has considered the comments received at that event and through subsequent representations, as well as the results of comprehensive engineering, environmental and economic assessments that have also been completed. That led to a comprehensive stage 2 preferred options report being undertaken, which also considered requests to provide a junction where the proposed bypass would cross Crossgar Road. I am pleased to inform Members that that report is now complete, and I will announce details of the preferred route in the Adjournment debate later this afternoon.

I recently had the pleasure of meeting elected representatives and local businesspeople from the Ballynahinch area, and although I fully acknowledge the significant representations made by the local community in support of the scheme, and my Department's support, I am unable at this point to advise when the Ballynahinch bypass is likely to be provided, as the level of funding likely to be available for strategic road improvements in future years has not yet been decided. I intend to consider spending priorities across my Department, including the strategic roads programme, when funding is confirmed.

Mr McCallister: I welcome the Minister's reply. He will be aware that his regional strategic transport network transport plan reports that average journey times through Ballynahinch took place at speeds as low as under 8 mph. Does the Minister agree that this has a serious adverse effect on businesses, tourism and commuters across the south Down area?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question and his interest in this particular scheme. I have, on many occasions, travelled through Ballynahinch and enjoyed the facilities offered, including its shopping. My hope and intention is that we can proceed with the Ballynahinch bypass as quickly as possible. I am interested, as roads Minister, in upgrading the network of roads throughout Northern Ireland, and I have listened closely and taken the opportunity to meet local representatives and businesspeople who have been advocating the scheme. I am aware of the arguments, and we continue to move that scheme forward as quickly as we possibly can.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for his responses. I noticed that the Minister was indeed in my constituency last Wednesday morning. He had a number of representatives around him, shaking hands and all the rest. I was in the office dealing with constituency matters. He never thought of coming and saying, "Mr McCarthy, come out and talk to us, get your photograph taken and all the rest of it."

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question?

Mr McCarthy: Perhaps the next time he will invite a very important element of that constituency to join him. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr McCarthy: In view of the cancellation or postponement of work on the A5 and, as has already been said, the seriousness of the situation, will the Strangford constituency and the Ballynahinch bypass have priority? Can we get our hands on some funding to provide that much-needed road?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I hope that he is not being pernickety, because that seems to have been a recent criticism of his party leader. *[Laughter.]*

For all that, the issue that the Member raises is an important one. I am afraid that those issues are not yet settled. However, as Minister responsible for roads, I repeat my assertion that I am interested in improving the road network throughout Northern Ireland, including in the Member's beloved Strangford constituency and possibly also the Ballynahinch bypass.

Electric Vehicles

3. **Mr A Maskey** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the electric vehicle infrastructure pilot scheme. *(AQO 1124/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: The Member may be aware of the successful bid for funding from the Office for Low Emission Vehicles in Whitehall by the Northern Ireland e-car consortium, which includes my Department. It has taken forward a significant programme of planning and development to ensure delivery of the project within the agreed time frame. I am pleased to confirm that, as a result of that work, we are now at a stage where we can begin to install the infrastructure. Over the next few weeks, more than 40 public charge points will be installed in the areas of Belfast City Council, Newry and Mourne District Council, Armagh City and District Council, Derry/Londonderry City Council, Larne Borough Council and Fermanagh District Council, with four rapid-charge points to be installed at key locations on our strategic road network. They should all be on site by the end of March 2012.

Currently, there are plans to install further fast-charge points during the 2012-13 financial year. However, we are seeking to expand that, and we have sought from councils not currently involved in the programme expressions of interest in joining the e-car consortium with a view to locating charge points in those council areas. In addition, a grant incentive is also being provided for the installation of home and workplace charging points.

Alongside that, work has been taken forward to develop an IT payment system and the e-car website to provide access to charge point location maps, grant application forms and other relevant information. Delivery of that important project will ensure that Northern Ireland has access to one of the most comprehensive electric vehicle charging infrastructures on these islands.

Mr A Maskey: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive response to the question. I commend him and his Department for the work done so far. Is he in a position to elaborate on what measures are being taken to encourage private vehicle owners to participate in this initiative?

Mr Kennedy: We want to encourage uptake of the scheme, which has been relatively slow up to this point. However, it is important that we put in place the infrastructure for charging points to encourage low-carbon-emission vehicles. Although purchase of those vehicles involves high charges, we want to bring forward the opportunity for car users to own and use them, and such cars will have a very positive impact on travel in Northern Ireland in the future.

Mr Dallat: I am very impressed by the Minister's illuminating answer. Can he throw some more light on how people can be encouraged to take that first tentative step towards acquiring electric-powered vehicles?

2.15 pm

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member. As usual, if not plugged in, he is sometimes wired up. *[Laughter.]*

Specific charge point locations have been identified throughout Northern Ireland. Each charge point will have two dedicated car park spaces, which will be located in priority car park locations in Department for Regional Development car parks, council car parks and shopping centres. Of course, home and workplace charging will be charged under existing home or workplace electricity bills. We are putting in place the mechanism whereby people can take up the scheme. Electric vehicles are only now coming on to the market. The plug-in car grant allows vehicle buyers to receive a grant of 25% towards the cost of a vehicle, up to a maximum of £5,000. I wish it had been more. In January 2012, it was announced that van buyers will also be able to receive a 20% grant, or up to £8,000 off the cost of plug-in vans. I hope that those measures give the Member some encouragement.

Mr Dickson: Minister, thank you for your electrifying performance so far. Can I be pernickety and ask the Minister whether he has any plans to assist large urban areas, perhaps the Belfast area and others, with the introduction of pay and drive/pay and hire electric vehicles?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member; pernicketyness seems to run in his party. I take on board what he said and will explore further opportunities for that. We are trying to encourage uptake. The grant measures, the charging points and other measures that will be brought forward will, collectively, improve opportunities.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 4 has been withdrawn.

A5: Reallocation of Funding

5. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on any reallocation of funding from the A5 road project to other road projects. *(AQO 1126/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: As Members know, the Irish Government have deferred the provision of further funding for progression of the A5 and A8 schemes, and will now provide £25 million per annum in 2015 and 2016 towards the projects. At the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) plenary meeting on 18 November 2011, the relevant Departments were tasked with preparing a new funding and implementation plan for the A5 and A8 projects to be agreed at the next NSMC transport meeting, for endorsement at the next NSMC plenary meeting.

That process is ongoing and has not yet reached a conclusion. I held discussions with the Minister of Finance and Personnel and expect to have further discussions with ministerial colleagues with a view to reaching a conclusion as swiftly as possible. As roads Minister, I am keen to give clarity on that issue, not least to those in the road construction industry, who are facing very severe problems and are keen for a resolution to those discussions.

Mr Easton: If the Minister is able to keep the money for the A5 project and has to reallocate some money to other projects, is he confident that the money will be kept in his

Department and, if so, will he ensure that north Down gets a slice of the cake?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. I accept that all politics is local. Yes; as roads Minister, I have clearly indicated that I am in the business of wanting to carry forward as many road projects as possible. There are significant issues with the A5 and the A8 funding, but that also provides us with opportunities to look at other potential schemes, which is why I have been keen to progress them, and I will continue to do that.

Mr Beggs: In reallocating funds that were originally earmarked for the A5, does the Minister agree that it is important to maximise the benefits to the economy by investing in areas identified as defective in the regional strategic roads network? Will he be investing in roads such as the A2 at Greenisland, the A8, the A26 and the road between the M2 and Londonderry, the A6?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. He did not miss many A roads in listing the schemes that are potentially available. As roads Minister, I have clearly outlined that I very much hope that I will soon be in a position to report to the Assembly on progress. We are beginning to edge towards the new financial year, and it is clear that budgetary expectations arise from that. It is absolutely essential that we give clarity and certainty, particularly to those in the roads construction industry, as to the way forward. Of course, I take careful note of the schemes to which he referred and can confirm that I am giving all those schemes active consideration.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. The A5 and A8 were joint projects that had earmarked funding from the Northern Government, but, obviously, uncertainty was created by the Irish Government's funding problems. Does that mean that preparatory work and statutory requirements on the A5 and A8 projects are still ongoing?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I can confirm that the A5 and A8 projects were indeed being carried forward jointly not only by the Northern Ireland Executive but by the Government of the Irish Republic, who have indicated that their contribution is now significantly less than that originally envisaged, which has consequences for the amount of work that will be possible. I am reviewing those issues in consultation with ministerial colleagues and officials.

It is not insignificant that we are still waiting for the inspector's independent report on the A5 project. The inspector will report in due course, separately and independently from me. My officials and I will then have an opportunity to examine the report to see whether there are issues that impact on the proposals that we seek to carry forward.

Magherafelt and Cookstown Bypasses

6. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the Magherafelt and Cookstown bypasses. *(AQO 1127/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: Mr McCrea, thank you for your question. I have visited Magherafelt and Cookstown — I am not sure whether you were made aware of that or whether Kieran McCarthy was told *[Laughter.]* — to get a better understanding of the traffic problems in those towns. I acknowledge the significant representations made by local representatives in support of those bypass schemes and, indeed, my Department's support for both schemes.

As the Member may be aware, the investment delivery plan for roads, which reflects the funding envisaged under the investment strategy for Northern Ireland 2008-2018, anticipated procurement through to delivery of the A31 Magherafelt and the A29 Cookstown bypasses in the 2013-14 to 2017-18 time frame. However, it is the new investment strategy for Northern Ireland 2011-2021, currently published for consultation, which will, when agreed, determine a likely timescale for the delivery of the Cookstown and Magherafelt bypasses. Meanwhile, I am happy to confirm that design work is continuing on both schemes so that they can be progressed quickly towards procurement when funding becomes available.

Mr I McCrea: I thank the Minister for his answer. Although I was not disappointed that I did not get an invitation to meet the Minister, I welcome his attendance in the area to view the situation for himself. During that viewing, the Minister will have seen the traffic flow difficulties in Magherafelt, at any time of the day, on any day of the week.

My recollection of doing a school assignment in my early teens, which is, I might add, over 20 years ago — not that long ago —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The question.

Mr I McCrea: Can the Minister give an assurance that he is fully committed to the projects and will move them forward as soon as funding is available?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question, and I thank him for the important biographical detail from his school memories that he provided to the House.

I must stress that I want to see significant road improvements across the road network, as in the case of Ballynahinch and other schemes. That is why, as roads Minister, I continue to bring these schemes forward in their various stages. I will continue to do that in the cases of Magherafelt and Cookstown. It is fair to say that the Magherafelt bypass is somewhat further ahead than the Cookstown bypass, so one hopes that it will hit the front of the grid at an earlier stage.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his responses to date, even though some of them have included snubs. I have to say to Mr McCarthy that he is very welcome to mid-Ulster at any time, regardless of whether there is a Minister there.

The Minister touched on the differing stages of advancement of the Cookstown and Magherafelt bypasses. Perhaps he can provide us with some detail of their level of advancement, together with that of the Toome bypass, if it is available, please. If those details are not available today, perhaps he can provide them in written form on some occasion.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member. Let me deal with the Cookstown bypass first. The preferred proposed route, as the Member will know, is to the east of the town. It

starts on the Dungannon Road roundabout to the south of the town and meets the Moneymore Road to the north at a new roundabout, over a distance of 3·95 kilometres. I hope that I am not going too fast for anybody. The proposal also provides for an extension of 300 metres to the existing dual carriageway between Cookstown and Moneymore to meet that new roundabout.

The estimated cost of the proposed Cookstown eastern distributor is in the range of £35 million to £45 million, and the estimated cost of the Magherafelt bypass is between £28 million and £40 million. Those are significant sums. As I have indicated, the Magherafelt scheme is slightly ahead of the Cookstown one. I will write to the Member and update him on the Toome bypass.

Mrs Overend: I thank my colleague from Mid Ulster for raising the question with the Minister. I am sure that the Minister knows that I have been lobbying him on the issue as well.

Farming land has been earmarked for the bypasses, and I am sure that the Minister is well aware that farmers are farming the land there. Time has progressed since the initial talk about the bypasses, and sons may now have been brought on to the farms who are trying to build the business. Will the Minister take that into consideration and address it when doing the valuation of the land?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for her supplementary. I pay tribute to her for the extensive lobbying that she continues to do and for the representations that she makes to me on the Magherafelt and Cookstown bypasses every time that she sees me.

Farmers and landowners require certainty. I am conscious of the fact that both schemes have been talked about for a considerable time, and we hope to give as much clarity and certainty as possible. There are processes to do with land take, how properties and land are affected, and disturbance. Those can begin to be evaluated, based on the prevailing market, only when the vesting order is operative. That is a matter for Land and Property Services.

Social Development

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Questions 5 and 8 have been withdrawn and require written answers.

Social Housing

1. **Mr P Maskey** asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of whether the number of social houses that are currently planned will be sufficient to cope with the anticipated increase in homelessness. *(AQO 1137/11-15)*

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The number of people in Northern Ireland who face losing their homes has more than doubled in the past five years. The increased threat of repossession, alongside further job losses and the impact of welfare reform changes, particularly those around housing benefit, means that we need to have a wide range of interventions available to support people when they need it most.

However, although building more social homes is important, it should not — indeed, it cannot — be the only answer. We must look for alternatives to suit the wide range of housing needs that people have. The size and style of our newbuild programme may also need to change to ensure that smaller, more suitable accommodation is available, particularly for older people who may be looking to downsize, which could free up larger homes for families.

2.30 pm

I want to protect those who rent privately by making the private rented sector an attractive alternative for those who cannot or do not necessarily want to access social housing. I also want to protect those facing repossession. Members may be interested to note that, since May 2011, over 700 people have used our mortgage debt advice service, with 142 of them directly prevented from being made homeless. I also want to increase the availability of affordable housing, and my recent support for co-ownership will help more first-time buyers than ever before to access their first home.

Finally, tackling the issue of empty homes offers a further opportunity to make more housing available. Nearly 100 existing homes that were long-term voids in Antrim, north Belfast and Downpatrick have already been identified as homes to be brought back into use, and more will follow. So, although the Member is right to highlight the increased threat of homelessness, we need a much wider and more holistic approach to tackling it, and the forthcoming housing strategy that we are preparing will seek to do that.

Mr P Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle agus a Aire. The Minister's Department forecasts that it will build some 8,000 homes over this mandate: 2,000 for the co-ownership scheme and 6,000 for social housing. Does he or his Department know exactly how many homes are needed? How many are actually on the homeless waiting list? What creative measures are his Department employing? He said that there would be many issues with regard to mortgage arrears and people's homes being repossessed. People are very worried at this stage, so some creative thinking is needed from the Department.

Mr McCausland: I agree that creative thinking is needed. The earlier part of that complex question raised the issue of predicting where we will be, which is very difficult to do. We have a sense of where we are at the moment, although there is a wide range of meanings and applications for the word "homeless". We are not yet clear about the implications of welfare reform, so it is impossible to predict precisely where we will be. However, the housing strategy that we are bringing forward will adopt a holistic and comprehensive approach that will be coherent in delivering what we need over the coming period.

Mr Storey: In his answer to the substantive question, the Minister referred to a wider-ranging definition of homelessness, which includes people who, unfortunately, find themselves on the street. What areas are the Minister and the Department looking at to address that issue and to draw a distinction between a definition of homelessness that concentrates on those who live on the street and one that includes people who have their property repossessed?

Mr McCausland: The first question is about how many people are actually homeless and the meaning of the term. Under the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1988, a person

is homeless if they have no accommodation in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, a person can be treated as homeless even if they have accommodation that is not fit for their needs or habitable. Last year, over 10,000 people on the waiting list were assessed as falling into the latter category, but I stress that that does not mean that they are actually homeless. People who are assessed as homeless may be living in temporary accommodation, staying with friends or, in a large number of cases, living in their own home.

The Housing Executive estimates that approximately 10 people sleep rough on the streets of Belfast on any given night. Members must realise that that is their own choice, if it can be described in that way. Very often, they are folk who are victims of circumstances and situations. No one needs to sleep on the streets, and there is enough accommodation across Northern Ireland for anyone who needs it.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Has the Department identified any constituencies as priority areas in dealing with homelessness?

Mr McCausland: Housing need varies from constituency to constituency. Obviously, however, the prioritising of work for the next number of years and the setting out of a social housing development programme will be spread across all constituencies because there is need everywhere. Sometimes, we get the sense that housing need is very focused on just one or two areas, but significant numbers of people are in housing stress across all constituencies.

Mr McGimpsey: When the population of certain areas of Belfast was rehoused, young families were moved out first, and those left were then rehoused. That resulted in a higher proportion of elderly people in the population than would normally be expected. What, if any, plans or proposals does the Minister have to address that legacy issue, which he inherited, by creating a better balance in those areas? That would also free up units to address homelessness.

Mr McCausland: The social housing development programme must reflect the real need. The difficulty has been that, over the past while, we have built only family homes. There are many single people, some of whom are young, and that issue will come to the fore in the future with welfare reform. Also, older folk may need to downsize, and we need to look at the appropriate provision for them. Having met and talked to senior citizens' forums, I found increasing awareness that simply building lots of bungalows is not necessarily the answer. Among other reasons for not doing so, the land, in some cases, is not available. There is growing awareness of the benefits of some schemes that housing associations already offer, such as small blocks of about 20 apartments that create a fantastic feeling of community and give an additional sense of security to older folk. For the future, we are looking at a social housing development programme that will be more tailored to actual need.

Welfare Reform: Mortgage Payments

2. **Mr McMullan** asked the Minister for Social Development what measures he will take to assist people who are unable to pay their mortgages because of the changes to benefit entitlement. *(AQO 1138/11-15)*

Mr McCausland: I recognise that the recent changes to the social security systems, aligned with the difficult economic conditions, present difficulties for all who find themselves unable to work for whatever reason. I am pleased to report that, last summer, I launched a contracted mortgage debt advice service to help those experiencing difficulty making mortgage payments to avoid the distressing prospect of court action and possible repossession. The free advice from the Housing Rights Service may help them to avoid repossession. For homeowners who are in receipt of income support, income-based jobseeker's allowance, income-based employment and support allowance or pension credit and have mortgage commitments, those benefits may also include an additional element called support for mortgage interest (SMI).

The contract for the mortgage debt advice service can operate until March 2015 at the latest. That service directs households to get and act on financial advice to help to alleviate their debt problems, and it can be contacted directly on 0300 323 0310. The extended service operates during office hours and now includes an online adviser and evening opening hours to 8.00 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The specialised service prevents people, where possible, from becoming homeless as a consequence of housing-related debt.

Support for mortgage interest is calculated by applying a standard interest rate to the outstanding capital. From 1 October 2010, that standard interest rate has been based on the Bank of England published average mortgage rate of 3·63%. Prior to that, the set rate of 6·08% was considered excessive and did not represent value for money to the taxpayer. In November 2009, a sample taken from Council of Mortgage Lenders data of those in receipt of SMI showed that the 6·08% rate had resulted in over 90% of people being paid more than their eligible mortgage interest liability.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Time is up.

Mr McMullan: Does the Minister agree that more people will lose their home because of mortgage arrears this year and that many of them depend on benefits that the coalition Government have cut? What measures have been put in place to ensure that those people do not become another statistic?

Mr McCausland: It is clear that over the past number of years there has been a rise in repossessions year on year. My Department does not have precise information on the number of houses repossessed each year. However, the Department of Justice provided me with details of the number of repossession cases disposed of by the Enforcement of Judgments Office in the past three years. Excluding those withdrawn, in 2009 there were 452 cases; in 2010, 724 cases; and in 2011, 953 cases.

A wide range of factors contribute to people losing their home, such as illness, relationship breakdown or job loss or a drop in family income, which can be factors of the economic climate. The mortgage debt advice service is something that we need to publicise more widely. One problem is that people often allow themselves to get to the point of being on the verge of losing the house without going to get the advice that they need, which may help them to avoid that difficulty. The earlier you get in, the better.

I encourage people to use that service as widely and as quickly as possible.

Mr Weir: Will the new SMI standard interest rate lead to an increase in repossessions?

Mr McCausland: We believe that a standard rate based on the Bank of England published average mortgage rate, currently 3·63%, will not in itself lead to an increase in repossessions for people on benefit. The previous rate of 6·08% was too generous and resulted in around 90% of people getting more than their eligible mortgage interest liability. I am sure we all recognise that that is not a good use of public funds and is unfair to the taxpayer. I am very satisfied that the standard rate is the right rate.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister inform the House, please, whether his Department has considered buying back repossessed houses that were previously social housing stock; that is, previous Housing Executive or housing association homes?

Mr McCausland: As yet, we have not considered a buy-back scheme. The housing strategy that is coming forward will, I think, address many of the problems that we are raising in not just this question but other questions today. Clearly, the problem is that the people who are getting into difficulties are not people who bought social housing but are largely outside that. I do not have precise figures on that, but that is the sense we have.

It has obviously spread right across the board; it is not limited to one sector. However, I am not convinced that buying back is necessarily the right way. Once you start down that road, do you do it for one person or one sector; do you do it for other sectors; where would you do it; up to what level or value of house do you do it; and where do you draw the limits?

Our focus should be very much on the advice service. That is the key. It is not in the interests of lenders to find themselves repossessing houses. It is much better that they get regular income from the repayment of the mortgage. Therefore, my view is that we are better concentrating on that. The other option does not, in general, seem to represent value for money.

Heating Oil

3. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the pay-as-you-go pilot scheme for home heating oil. *(AQO 1139/11-15)*

Mr McCausland: In December, I announced an exciting and innovative pay-as-you-go option for oil heating for vulnerable households. The technology could see significant savings for those who use drums rather than have oil delivered in larger quantities. I met representatives from Kingspan Environmental and Carillion Energy Services who will take that pilot forward. The pilot will allow us to road-test a unique technology that will allow oil from tanks to be released to boilers as needed, helping those most in need to budget and benefit from the savings gained by those buying oil in larger quantities. Kingspan is continuing to progress the technology, and Carillion is working with the Housing Executive to identify 10 private and 10 Housing Executive homes where the technology can be installed. I expect the new technology to be installed in those pilot homes in mid-February. Once the pilot is completed, a full evaluation will be undertaken. If it is successful, we expect to incorporate a pay-as-you-go option for oil in future energy efficiency schemes that will be delivered by the Department.

2.45 pm

Mr Moutray: I thank the Minister for his response. Will he further outline the position on the double glazing of Northern Ireland Housing Executive homes?

Mr McCausland: All the issues around fuel poverty and making homes more energy-efficient are very much in our thinking at the moment. The Housing Executive currently installs double glazing as part of its external cyclical maintenance (ECM) programme. Extra funding secured through the monitoring round has enabled an increase in that activity. The Housing Executive is working to identify the additional properties that will require double glazing. Once that information is available, as is required by the draft Programme for Government, by March 2012, it will prepare a programme for the installation of double glazing in all Housing Executive homes by the end of 2015.

Mr Nesbitt: I return to the pay-as-you-go pilot scheme. Will the Minister offer some clarity on the ownership of the oil in the domestic tanks of people who will use the pay-as-you-go technology? Specifically, in the event of theft, will the supplier or the consumer bear the risk?

Mr McCausland: During the pilot scheme, the oil tank will be fitted with an anti-tamper device to prevent that happening. Any persistent interference would mean that that householder is removed from the pilot scheme.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Although any technology and schemes to alleviate fuel poverty in vulnerable households are welcome, does the Minister agree that proposed benefit cuts will continue to increase that problem for vulnerable households?

Mr McCausland: I am sure that the Member will agree that we all look with considerable concern and interest at the unfolding of welfare reform as it is being taken through Westminster at the moment. We have to wait and see what the full implications are, but, certainly, the coalition Government at Westminster intend to make savings and reduce benefit expenditure. Therefore, there will be reductions in income for some people. We must do all that we can to alleviate any difficulties that arise from that. That has to be our priority over the next while.

Housing: East Belfast

4. **Mr Newton** asked the Minister for Social Development how many newbuild homes are proposed for the East Belfast constituency in each year from 2012 to 2015. *(AQO 1140/11-15)*

Mr McCausland: The information that was requested by the Member is not currently available. The Housing Executive is currently finalising the social housing development programme for 2012-15. I expect it to be with me for consideration by late February or early March. The Programme for Government contains a commitment

to deliver 8,000 new social and affordable homes over the next four years. I reassure the Member that East Belfast will get its fair share.

Although I do not yet have access to that programme, I am pleased that, following our recent interventions, Belfast City Council has agreed to dispose of its surplus Clara Street civic amenity site to a housing association to help to meet housing need in that area. I fully expect to see that site included in the programme when it is sent to me in the coming months. Plans are also being drawn up to bring forward a comprehensive housing strategy that will help me to ensure that the money available targets those most in need and will provide social and affordable homes, improve the private rented sector and make available mortgage advice to those who are in danger of losing their home. I am conscious that many people in east Belfast also face the risk of repossession, so it is important that we look at as wide a range of interventions as possible to support people at their most vulnerable.

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for his answer. I recognise his wide span of concern not just for those who are in the difficult situation of arrears but for the provision of social housing. I know that the Minister shares my concerns that between 4,000 and 6,000 people in the east of the city are in difficulty. I hope that he will take on board the need to meet their needs for adequate social housing or affordable homes in the future.

Mr McCausland: Housing need in east Belfast at the end of March 2011 was as follows: 1,817 applicants were on the waiting list, 912 of whom were in housing stress. Interestingly, over half of those in housing stress were single people. That goes back to the point that I made earlier about developing housing that is appropriate for single people.

Mr A Maskey: Can the Minister confirm that the fundamental objective of social housing provision is to meet the objective need?

Mr McCausland: Northern Ireland needs a comprehensive approach whereby there is housing provision right across the board that meets people's needs, whether it be social housing, affordable housing or private rented housing — all those different sectors. Some people will want to go into the social housing sector. Some people will take the private sector route. Some will choose affordable housing. There is a package of provision that meets need.

Mr Copeland: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. Mr Newton referred to a substantially larger number of people in housing need. Can the Minister confirm that the figure that he mentioned was for applications and not applicants?

Mr McCausland: The information that I have in front of me states that there were 1,817 applicants on the waiting list; that is, individuals who indicated that they require a house. An individual may be the head of a household or whatever. That is the number of applicants. That is the way in which we normally deal with those figures.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 5 has been withdrawn.

Pensions Bill

6. **Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the introduction of the Pensions Bill. *(AQO 1142/11-15)*

Mr McCausland: Members will be aware that the Pensions Bill had its First Stage yesterday.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for his response. Given that the equivalent Bill in Parliament received Royal Assent on 3 November 2011, can the Minister account for why the House saw the First Stage of the Northern Ireland Pensions Bill only yesterday? Furthermore, what impact will the breach of parity have on Northern Ireland?

Mr McCausland: The Pensions Bill is being brought forward as quickly as possible. It is important that we do so, and that is what we are endeavouring to do. The Bill is a precursor to the increase in the state pension age to 66 for men and women, and that will happen in due course. Other changes are coming down the road. We need to do those things as quickly as possible. However, as the Member indicated, equivalent legislation has been through Westminster and received Royal Assent on 3 November. It has taken us a number of weeks to get to this point. We are moving as quickly as possible. Indeed, the Member will have the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the Bill within a matter of days.

Mr F McCann: I thank the Minister for his answers. Does he agree that the Pensions Bill will have serious financial consequences and many people will fall into financial hardship as a result?

Mr McCausland: I do not want to predict what the final outcome of the Bill will be, although parity suggests what it might be. It is fair to say that the proposed change to the pension age will have a significant impact on many people. The move to bring the pension age for women into line with that for men is bound to have an impact. However, some of the changes are required by equality legislation. The European law requirement for equality of treatment of men and women in matters of social security — directive 79/7/EEC — demands apparently that there be equality between men and women. Therefore, we are forced into that situation. It is a change that we must accept.

The longer-term issue of increasing the pension age for men and women to 66 by 2020 is obviously a Westminster Government intention that is based, generally, on increased life expectancy, making the current timetable for change unsustainable in their view.

Ms Lewis: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Will the proposals impact more on people with disabilities?

Mr McCausland: It is generally acknowledged that disabled people are likely to have lower levels of private pension provision, less likely to be in employment in the period leading up to the state pension age and more reliant on working-age benefits. However, the Westminster Government believe that the proposed changes are needed to ensure that the state pension system, including pension credit, is affordable in the long term and will provide a decent income in retirement. The upper age limit for receipt of working-age benefits, along with disability premiums and DLA, will extend to meet an individual's new state pension age.

Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division

7. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline any changes he intends to make to improve the delivery of services offered to clients by the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division. *(AQO 1143/11-15)*

Mr McCausland: It is a priority for the division to promote and embed behavioural changes among parents so that they take financial responsibility for their children. To that end, parents are being supported to make their own maintenance arrangements. A media campaign is currently running to promote the child maintenance choices service, which is a free, confidential helpline service to help parents decide the child maintenance arrangements that best suit their needs.

A new statutory child maintenance scheme due to be launched in late 2012 will improve the way in which child maintenance is calculated. It will be a simpler scheme supported by a new computer system, which will take information from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to calculate child maintenance assessments.

My Department has introduced a range of new enforcement powers over the past few years. Those powers improve delivery of services by giving the division new enforcement tools to recover money from non-resident parents who do not fulfil their responsibility to pay child maintenance.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for that answer and for the detail of what is coming up in the next few months. Like others in the House, I know that a lot of constituency issues are born out of frustration. What enforcement powers are available to the Department?

Mr McCausland: There are ways in which money can be recouped from people who have not paid, but I would prefer to answer you more fully on that in due course. We have a range of powers to enable the Department to take firm action to ensure that parents meet their financial responsibilities. They include deduction orders; deduction from earnings orders; liability orders; charges on property; orders for the sale of property; driving licence disqualification; committal to prison; and freezing orders. Therefore, there is a wide range of options.

We can also arrange for deduction of maintenance payments and/or arrears from bank accounts without the need to apply through the courts. Recovery of arrears can also be made from a deceased person's estate. If you want further information on any of those matters, we can provide that.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat Phriomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Can we expect the enforcement division to be more active as a result of the changes that the Minister proposes to introduce?

Mr McCausland: The improvements in the system will facilitate the enforcement that we are talking about.

Village, Belfast: Regeneration

9. **Mr Spratt** asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the regeneration of the Village area in south Belfast. *(AQO 1145/11-15)*

Mr McCausland: After many years in the planning, I was delighted to start the demolition process last summer, allowing the regeneration of the Village to begin in earnest. The sites for phases 1 and 2 have been cleared. The community design team has agreed with Fold Housing Association the designs for phase 1, with 37 properties, and phase 2, with 50 properties, of the new homes that will be put back on the cleared sites. The relevant planning applications have been submitted, and both schemes are scheduled to commence in March. I have already made the funding available for that.

Our work in the Village is not just about replacing old homes with new. Some 60% of homes in the area lie in what is called the improvement zone. The Housing Executive has acquired 25 derelict properties in that zone that will be transferred to Hearth and Fold housing associations for rehabilitation. Housing Executive stock in the improvement zone will be improved with kitchen and window replacement schemes, and those are programmed to start in April.

A proactive promotion of grant aid in the improvement zone has been successful in attracting 109 preliminary enquiries, all of which have been inspected by grants technical officers. Some 91 schedules of grant-aided works have been issued, and 23 grant approvals have been issued, of which six schemes have started on site and five have completed the grant-aided works. That level of work — demolishing old homes, building new homes and improving existing homes — is in line with our commitment to regenerate the wider Village area.

3.00 pm

Ministerial Statement

Royal Jubilee Maternity Service, Belfast: Neonatal Unit

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): First, let me reiterate my deepest condolences to the parents and families whose babies tragically died as a result of the pseudomonas infection. I also wish to extend my thoughts and prayers to all the families involved. I know there are many others who feel anxious in these very difficult circumstances.

I want to set the scene by looking at what we know about the pseudomonas bacterium. It is an organism that can be found in many natural environments, including soil and water. It can be found in sinks, taps and water systems and can be difficult to eradicate. The pseudomonas bacterium can be present on the skin without causing infection. Some of us may even be carrying it now; that is known as colonisation. However, if the bacterium enters the body and gets into the bloodstream, lungs or urine, it can cause infection. The infection can be treated with antibiotics.

Pseudomonas infections occur mainly in immunocompromised and debilitated patients. The bacterium rarely causes infection in otherwise healthy individuals. From 2008 to 2011 in Northern Ireland, we have seen, on average, between 80 and 90 cases of pseudomonas bacteraemia per annum across all age groups. For children under one, the numbers are in single figures. Outbreaks of pseudomonas have occurred in intensive care facilities around the world, as patients in those facilities are frequently immunocompromised. For example, there were a number of outbreaks in English and Welsh hospitals in 2010. In response, my Department issued guidance on best practice on the management of infection risks associated with water sources.

Unfortunately, babies in neonatal units are already vulnerable due to clinical conditions and varying degrees of prematurity. Their immune systems are not fully developed, and that makes them less able to withstand infections, including those that would not cause problems in healthy babies. It is important to keep those facts in mind as we seek to understand how the outbreak could have happened and what we need to do in response.

I will now turn the clock back to look at what has happened regarding pseudomonas over the past few months. An incident of pseudomonas infection occurred in Altnagelvin Hospital neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) in December 2011 and was reported in the local media at the time. The Western Trust worked closely with the Public Health Agency (PHA) and kept the parents of babies in the unit fully informed. There were three cases of pseudomonas bacteraemia. One baby sadly died and, again, I offer my condolences to that family. One baby recovered, and one was transferred to the Royal Jubilee Maternity Service (RJMS), with appropriate infection-control procedures implemented. It is important to note that the strain of the pseudomonas bacterium in the two units is different. In response to the situation in Altnagelvin, the Chief Medical Officer and the departmental estates officer jointly issued a letter to the trusts on 22 December, reminding them of the potential infection risks posed by water systems in healthcare facilities and reinforcing important messages regarding the use of sinks and general hygiene.

That brings me to the current outbreak in the Royal Jubilee Maternity Service. On 6 January, a baby died in the Royal Jubilee Maternity Service from pseudomonas bacteraemia. Then, a further baby died of pseudomonas bacteraemia on 13 January. There are many different types of pseudomonas bacteria, and detailed typing is performed in a reference lab in England. Such tests take time to conduct, and the results are not available immediately. However, on 16 January, typing confirmed that there were two babies with the same strain of pseudomonas in the same unit within a short period of time. The trust met on Tuesday 17 January to discuss those results and declared an outbreak. That information was relayed to the PHA and onward to the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and to the Department late on Tuesday. My officials provided me with all available details on Wednesday 18 January.

You will appreciate that this is a complex, evolving situation that requires considerable detective work to piece together what is happening. I was in a position to issue a press statement on Thursday 19 January. Unfortunately, later that day, a third baby died and a further press release was issued. Further updates followed as the situation unfolded.

I want to focus now on the hunt for the source of infection. As I said earlier, pseudomonas is present in many natural environments, including soil and water. It can be found in sinks, taps and water systems and can be difficult to eradicate. For that reason, sinks, taps and water systems are obvious places to start looking. However, pseudomonas is a micro-organism that can be difficult to eradicate completely and permanently. I can report that investigations so far have shown that pseudomonas bacteria have been found in a number of taps in the intensive care area of the neonatal unit in the RJMS. The trust's health estates team is in the process of removing and replacing all taps and related pipework in the affected area. There is no evidence of pseudomonas in the water system, which indicates that it is likely to be a localised problem. Specialist advice has been received from experts in England, and action is based on the current and best available evidence. That work should be completed within the next couple of weeks. The unit will be opened once all remedial work is completed and tests show that it is safe to nurse babies in that environment.

That brings me to the latest position. I want to be completely clear about where we are now. Clearly, the situation can change from hour to hour, and it has. However, at this point today, we believe that there have been pseudomonas infections in a total of seven babies who were associated with the outbreak in the Belfast NICU. Of those seven babies, three died in the RJMS neonatal unit; one recovered from pseudomonas, but died later from unrelated causes; two recovered from the infection and are still in the RJMS neonatal unit; and one in the RJMS neonatal unit has pneumonia and is being treated as being potentially infected. Although laboratory results have yet to be confirmed, doctors have a high index of suspicion and are treating that baby on clinical grounds.

In addition, by the evening of 23 January, six babies were colonised but have no signs of infection. It is important

to note that colonisation means that they are carrying the infection — for example, on their skin — but colonisation, in itself, does not make them ill. I will now give a breakdown of those six babies. Three babies who are currently in the RJMS have been shown to be colonised but have no signs of infection. Two babies who had no pseudomonas on screening were transferred out of the RJMS, one to Antrim Area Hospital and one to Craigavon Area Hospital, and on screening after arrival, both were found to be colonised. One baby remains in isolation, while the other is well and has been discharged home. One baby who was previously treated in the RJMS neonatal unit and was transferred out to Daisy Hill Hospital some weeks ago is colonised.

A number of babies in other neonatal units also have confirmed pseudomonas colonisation. The situation on the evening of 23 January showed that two babies in Altnagelvin Area Hospital and two babies in Craigavon Area Hospital were affected. Those babies do not have active infections but were detected through screening that was carried out as a precautionary measure. At this time, it seems that these babies are not directly related to the RJMS outbreak. It is important to realise that it is not uncommon to detect pseudomonas bacteria on the skin of babies in normal clinical practice in neonatal units.

The findings illustrate the complexity of the situation. The main focus to date has been on the neonatal unit in the RJMS. However, as the bacterium has been found in babies in some of the other neonatal units, management of the situation requires co-ordination and co-operation between all the trusts. The Public Health Agency will, therefore, ensure that all public health aspects are managed and will work closely with the Health and Social Care Board on the ongoing provision of neonatal services. All trusts will be involved and will take appropriate action as advised.

I fully understand the anxiety of parents and of the wider community across Northern Ireland. However, as I informed Assembly Members yesterday, my Department, the HSCB, the trusts, the Public Health Agency and the Ambulance Service have worked and will continue to work closely together to ensure continuity of care for infants, support for their families, and the ongoing management of the outbreak.

I wish to make a few other points. First, there have been concerns about the impact of the outbreak on the ability to maintain neonatal provision in Northern Ireland. I am pleased to report that, at present, the neonatal network is managing well. However, the number of babies who require neonatal care can change from hour to hour. Well-established arrangements are in place to ensure that when babies require a neonatal cot, they can be transferred to a unit in Northern Ireland, another part of the UK or the Republic of Ireland. Secondly, I want to reassure women that the delivery wards and all other services at the RJMS are operating as normal. Expectant mothers should attend their appointments as scheduled.

I wish to thank staff across the health sector for their continued dedication and commitment in caring for babies at this difficult time. Staff across the entire health sector work tirelessly to provide a safe and caring environment for patients, and I want to express my gratitude to them all. In addition, I pay tribute to the work of the Public Health Agency in providing expert health protection advice and to the Health and Social Care Board as it ensures that neonatal services remain available for babies. At present, my priority is to manage the outbreak, but it is vital to learn lessons from the situation so that we can reduce the risk of its happening again. In the longer term, the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) is considering the most effective way to approach inspections in intensive care settings such as neonatal units.

The trusts, the PHA, the HSCB and the Department continue to manage and monitor the situation. A teleconference is in progress now, and one has taken place every day since the situation began. I stress that, although the information I have given is correct, based on information from yesterday's teleconference, the situation is complex and dynamic, and the numbers quoted will change. Further updates will be issued.

Some Members may have received the wrong statement, and I apologise for that. A revised statement has been issued, which we were updating until I arrived in the Chamber.

Ms Gildernew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I was not here for the Minister's response to yesterday's question for urgent oral answer, so I want to express my condolences to the three families who lost babies in the Royal Victoria Hospital's neonatal unit. I understand that you never get over losing a baby, so our thoughts and prayers are with those three families.

We also need to think about the parents who are anxiously waiting to find out whether their babies, who have tested positive for pseudomonas on their skin, will develop the infection and about the parents and families of the other 24 babies who were tested and whose results, thankfully, came back negative. It is a very anxious wait for those parents.

I also want to think today of the family from Derry who lost their precious baby in Altnagelvin Hospital before Christmas. It is my understanding that the source of the pseudomonas bacteria was identified as taps and a sink in Altnagelvin Hospital. A few short weeks later, we hear about three families who have suffered the loss of a precious child and that the possible source of the infection in those cases is also likely to have been taps and sinks in the Royal Victoria Hospital. The Minister outlined some of the steps that have been taken, and I accept that some of the babies concerned have other medical complications, but does he think that enough has been done to try to save the lives of those very vulnerable children? It is hard to believe that, within less than a month, taps have also been identified as a possible source of the outbreak in Belfast. Will the Minister comment on that?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for the question. Whatever the situation, it is horrific when parents lose their babies, who are very precious to them. In the wake of the incident in Altnagelvin Hospital, the Chief Medical Officer and the Department's chief estates officer wrote a joint letter to all trusts on 22 December highlighting water sources as potential infection risks to patients and reinforcing important messages about infection control. I have received assurances from the Belfast Trust that it has followed the due process set out for it, and, over the coming weeks, we will be able to test that fully. My priority is to manage the situation by ensuring that babies receive the care they need while experts continue to assess and reduce the risk of infections.

3.15 pm

The situation is evolving, and new information becomes available daily. Clinicians, infection control and the health estates experts are all working together to agree how to manage the various aspects of the outbreak. We will continue to monitor the situation, and, in due course, we will take the opportunity to learn lessons for the wider system.

Mr Wells: I thank the Minister for his statement. We are relieved to know that we now have identified the source of the infection, which is the taps in the Royal. Those taps were replaced a year ago, and a lot of work is being done to replace the current plumbing system. If we know that taps are a source of the infection, what can we do to prevent this from reoccurring in the future?

Mr Poots: As I indicated, we are currently replacing the taps and sinks. We have requested information from the Health Protection Agency and, indeed, we have asked it for permission to install taps that have ultraviolet lighting on them that will kill bacteria at source. It is our intention to install those taps in the system later this week. I hope that, as result of installing the most modern taps, the situation will not reoccur where that type of bacteria will develop in the water system and be fed through the taps.

Mr McCallister: As colleagues have done, I and my party express our condolences to all of the families involved. We are thinking about those who have babies still in the unit, and they can be sure of our support at this very difficult time for them. Yesterday, Minister, I asked about the RQIA's role, and you assured me that you would come back today with some answers around its role in ordering a deep clean of the unit of the hospital involved and how effective that would be. Can you give us some more details on how you see the role of the RQIA in whether an inquiry or some sort of investigation will be necessary to help to ensure that we get best practice and do all that we can to learn as many lessons as possible so that this dreadful episode is never repeated?

Mr Poots: I thank Members for their patience. Indeed, I thank the media, which have reported this in a responsible, sensible and sensitive way, given the nature of the problem. We have been making significant progress in identifying the source and in identifying babies who have it on their skin. We have been taking action to prevent it from becoming active and live, leading to infections. We appreciate the fact that a considerable amount of work has been done. It is most important work, and it involves dealing with the existing problem.

Once this has all settled down, there will be an opportunity for us to look at what happened to ensure that a similar situation does not arise again. As I indicated in my statement, the RQIA is currently looking at how it conducts its inspections of neonatal units. Indeed, our clinicians and experts in infection control are meeting daily. The regional guidelines for screening and management are co-ordinated by the Public Health Agency. We are very happy to work closely with RQIA in looking at how this developed and at how it could be avoided in future.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement and I reiterate our sympathy for the families who have lost their precious babies and our support for everyone else involved. Yesterday, I asked the Minister a question regarding the capacity, in terms of cots, of neonatal care in Northern Ireland and whether he deemed that capacity to be sufficient. Further to that question, does the Minister believe that a reconfiguration or different distribution of neonatal places and staff might not only make infection control easier, but, in the event of a future outbreak of infection, make it less likely that babies will have to go to other jurisdictions for care, exacerbating what is already a traumatic time for their families?

Mr Poots: We normally have some slack in the system in Northern Ireland, for which I am grateful. The Royal Jubilee Maternity Service's neonatal unit has a capacity of 31. It is operating at 24, and a few cots are available for level 1, which is the highest level of intensive care treatment that can be provided. So, there is still capacity in the system and that is an area of the neonatal unit that is not the subject of any infection. Therefore, there would not be a risk to a baby going into that facility.

It is important that the Royal Jubilee Maternity Service remains the largest facility for neonatal care, because we have our regional paediatric unit, intensive care and all of that there. I think that that will continue to be the case. We have a good regional spread, in that we have facilities in Daisy Hill, Craigavon, Antrim, Altnagelvin and Enniskillen hospitals. We are well spread across Northern Ireland hospitals, so, in that respect, we are reasonably well covered.

We have a current problem and are grateful for the support of those in other jurisdictions at this time. I am sure that, if they were having a problem, we would be happy to reciprocate that support.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for again coming to the Chamber to give us information. The water taps seem to be the problem rather than the water supply. Will the Minister advise, if possible, whether the problem is what those taps, which must have been there for a considerable time, are made of, or has something got on to the taps? If so, how can we avoid such an outbreak in future?

Mr Poots: The taps have been in place for just over a year. So, it is not the case that it was old equipment. It was relatively modern equipment. Mr Wells put his finger on it when he asked how we stop this happening in a year's time. That is why we are working to introduce taps with ultraviolet light that will kill bacteria in the water system. That is another area in which we can challenge this. I am glad that the source of infection is not in the water system. It is in the taps and it is something that happens. Unfortunately, the consequences, in this instance, have been fatal. That is something in that neonatal facility that has caused huge distress to parents.

Ms P Bradley: I also thank the Minister for his timely statement. Has he met nurses or staff at the Royal or any other neonatal unit since the outbreak?

Mr Poots: Yes. On Friday, I attended a press conference at the Royal Jubilee Maternity Service. Afterwards, I met a considerable number of staff. I did not go into the ward because I did not want to add to the problem, but I met doctors, nurses and other staff outside the ward. They themselves were quite traumatised by all that had gone on. Unfortunately, some people on websites and so forth have been suggesting that it is a dirty hospital. That is clearly not

the case, and the evidence is very clear that that is not the case. The staff have been following protocols and maintain a clean facility. They maintain very high standards of hand hygiene and so forth. So all credit to the staff.

Last night, I visited Antrim Area Hospital because I wanted to take a look at the A&E service. While I was there, I took the opportunity of visiting the staff at the neonatal unit — again, I did not go into the neonatal unit — and I had a conversation with them about the work that is going on. The care that is being offered by our doctors, nurses and other staff in those facilities is second to none, and I have the highest praise possible for the individuals who save the lives of hundreds of little babies every year; babies who, a few generations ago, would have had no prospect of surviving.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for bringing his statement to the House. It is quite useful. When we get information we can act as a conduit between ourselves, this place and our constituents. I made a similar comment yesterday.

On the back of the incident in Altnagelvin, where there was the death of a baby, was a deep clean of Altnagelvin ordered? If not, is there a difference between the outbreak in Altnagelvin and the outbreak in the maternity ward in Belfast? The Minister may not have this information here, but is there information on the number of deaths of children in our hospitals over the last two years due to hospital-acquired infections? If so, have we learned any of the lessons from that as to how we can treat and be proactive on some of the public health issues?

Mr Poots: The Public Health Agency gave advice on the Altnagelvin situation afterwards, so there was a replacement of sinks and so forth immediately after that incident. There was also a vaporisation of the facility — it is a relatively new facility — which should eliminate the bacteria from the site.

In relation to pseudomonas vis-à-vis other hospital-acquired infections, I have spoken to my Chief Medical Officer about the matter, and he is going to raise it with his counterparts to look at how we can better deal with pseudomonas in the future and better prepare to ensure that it has less of an impact. As I indicated, this is not the first time it has happened. In the last four or five years, we have looked at 80 to 90 cases each year. It affects people in burns units, people whose immune system has been compromised as a result of chemotherapy and many other vulnerable people. That 80 to 90 people has largely consisted of adults and older children and has not often included younger children. It is certainly an area that we can look at again, and this is a matter that the Chief Medical Officer will take forward on my behalf.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his statement. What has been his assessment of the level of engagement and collaboration between the different parts of his Department and the multiple agencies involved following the outbreak?

Mr Poots: From the outset, I have participated in some of the conference calls and so forth. Every day, all the trusts, the Public Health Agency, the HSCB and the Chief Medical Officer's team do conference calling, identifying what the situation is in each trust area and how to progress things. The health estates team is there providing expert advice. So the system is working very well together in responding to the issue, and it is having a positive impact on a very negative situation.

3.30 pm

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas. I thank the Minister for his statement, in which he described the situation as both complex and sensitive. He dealt with the issue in a very adequate way in his presentation today. He also said that there are vital lessons that we have to learn. Sometimes, when you are learning lessons, difficult questions have to be asked. Asking those difficult questions should not be seen as trying to find blame, but we have to take the process forward.

I have not seen the letter, but you said in your statement that a letter was issued by the Chief Medical Officer on 22 December. Was any reference made in that warning to other hospitals to the fact that a child had died in Altnagelvin 12 days previously?

Mr Poots: The letter that the Chief Medical Officer issued contained advice on management of sinks, and so forth. Sinks in those facilities should be used only for hand washing. They should not be used for disposing of fluids or anything like that. It is made clear that sinks are purely for hand washing and that staff should apply sanitiser to their hands afterwards.

I am not exactly sure whether the letter indicated the nature of what happened in Altnagelvin. However, I am quite happy to provide the Member with the information if he feels that it would be helpful.

Mr Byrne: I, like others, welcome the Minister's statement and empathise with the families involved.

Does the Minister accept that, when they hear about a deep-cleaning exercise, people become concerned about routine cleaning and hygiene management? Given that there is concern about lessons being learned for the future, can the Minister assure the public that all resources are being put at the disposal of the neonatal units so that hygiene is an absolute priority?

Mr Poots: Hospital cleaning goes on daily and should be to a very high standard. A lot of that comes down to the human beings who actually do it. It is very important that the people who are in charge of the wards ensure that the cleaners carry it out to the optimum standard. There is a considerable difference between that and deep cleaning. Keeping a ward clean, ensuring good hand hygiene, and so forth, to reduce the risk of infection is standard procedure. Deep cleans take place to remove micro-organisms that are so small that they can live even in environments that appear, on the surface, to be well-cleaned environments. There is an association between the cleanliness of a hospital and many of the bacteria that can survive in that clean environment, and we are aware of that association. Good practice should eliminate most of the problems that arise from that association.

The situation in respect of hospital-acquired infections such as MRSA and clostridium difficile has improved quite dramatically. We are now looking at around half as many infections as was the case a couple of years ago. However, there is much more that can be done and much more that we can learn. One of the places from which we can probably

learn most is Camp Bastion in Afghanistan. People such as triple amputees regularly go in there, but there are very low levels of infection. It is one of the most fantastically run facilities, given the risks and the conditions in which it operates.

More can be learned about hospital-acquired infections. We recently had an expert over from England who has been responsible for doing a lot of work in that area. Our trust chiefs, our Chief Medical Officer and a range of people from our hospitals came to learn about these issues. One hospital in Birmingham has been identified as having gone 800 days without a report of any hospital-acquired infections. That is the sort of level that we should aspire to and aim for here in Northern Ireland. I do not want to see any level of hospital-acquired infection; that is not a good enough target. I want to get it down to zero.

Ms Lewis: I thank the Minister for his statement on this very serious issue. Our thoughts are with the families affected. Will the Minister clarify what advice has been offered to trusts in their screening and management of individuals carrying the infection on their skin?

Mr Poots: I want to make it very clear that the babies who were transferred from the Royal Jubilee Maternity Service had been screened before they left, and no infection was identified. However, when they arrived at other facilities and were screened again, it showed that the bacteria was on their skin. There are courses of work to be done, and our clinicians and experts in infection control meet daily. They have regional guidelines for screening and management, and work is being co-ordinated by the Public Health Agency to ensure that all the risks posed by individuals potentially carrying the infection on their skin are minimised.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, thank the Minister for his statement and offer sympathy to the families who have been so tragically bereaved by the loss of their babies.

The Minister spoke about the installation of taps with ultraviolet light that would minimise or help to combat this particular bacterium, which is obviously one that is difficult to deal with. Will he consider the installation of those taps in all neonatal units, such as Daisy Hill, and in all units where immunocompromised and debilitated patients are at risk? I think he will agree that we need to be proactive rather than reactive in this situation.

Mr Poots: Clearly, if we have had 80 to 90 cases a year of pseudomonas, and it has had its impact on individuals and caused death before now, it is an area that we will look at. It is appropriate that our Chief Medical Officer gives us further advice on the issue. It is a completely rational action to be taken in the case of the Royal Jubilee Maternity Service, and if that equipment is available at that site, why should it not be available at other sites where there are vulnerable people? I look forward to receiving that advice in due course.

Mr T Clarke: I join others in passing on sympathy to the families affected and those affected here today. The Minister's statement referred to six babies who were colonised. I notice that one of those babies was transferred to Antrim Area Hospital and was screened afterwards. I am not trying to raise fear, but the statement said that the child was colonised before it was taken to Antrim. Does the Minister think that was a wise decision to take, given that the child was colonised before it left the Royal Victoria Hospital and was taken to Antrim?

Mr Poots: I want to clarify that the child did not have bacteria on its skin, or any evidence of bacteria on its skin, when it left the Royal. This became evident only when the child came to Antrim Area Hospital. The practices that Antrim Area Hospital use ensure that the safety of other babies in that unit was not compromised in any way, shape or form. Whenever a new baby comes in, they always, under any circumstances, isolate that baby and provide care in isolation from others until they are wholly and totally satisfied that the baby is ready to be treated in a wider area. Good practice in Antrim Area Hospital has and will ensure that other babies are not compromised in any way as a result of the baby moving from the Royal Hospital to Antrim.

Mr G Robinson: How many nurses are employed in the network of neonatal units across Northern Ireland?

Mr Poots: I am not sure how many nurses are employed. There are 105 cots, and they provide three different levels of care, with level 1 as the highest. The cots cost around £500,000 each, so there has been significant past investment in neonatal care. As I indicated, the quality of care offered by our staff ensures that many babies' lives are saved. We currently fund 269·3 working full-time equivalent nurses, with 263 in post.

Mr McDevitt: The Minister made reference to the Public Health Agency's regional guidelines for screening and management on a number of occasions during his statement and replies. Do those guidelines apply to the screening of neonatal intensive care units — the infrastructure, buildings and associated equipment in the unit? If so, when was the last time that the neonatal intensive care units in Altnagelvin and the Royal Victoria Hospital were screened for potentially harmful bacteria and viruses?

Mr Poots: A constant effort is made during the work that is done in those facilities to reduce the possibility of infection. Because the babies have such low immune systems, staff, at all times, are made aware and work on the basis that those babies are very vulnerable to infection. Therefore, in everything that they do and every action that they take, staff seek to ensure that they do not compromise a baby's safety further by dropping their guard with respect to hygiene. So, constant work takes place to ensure the safety of children in those circumstances.

As I indicated earlier, this happened in the water system, inside and around the taps. It has nothing whatever to do with the staff who provide the care in hospitals. They have done an excellent job throughout, and they continue to do that.

Mr Allister: Undoubtedly, this has been a very distressing situation. Most of us can but imagine the depth of that distress for the families affected. We are also mindful of the distress of the staff in dealing with this situation. I am sure that the Minister himself has found it distressing to try to manage this position.

I suspect that, in due course, there will be another forum, where these matters will be more forensically and thoroughly interrogated. However, for now, I ask the Minister this: you tell us that the child who was brought from Londonderry to the Royal had one particular strain of bacteria, but could

that strain of bacteria have mutated into a different strain, which was then found in the Royal, or is that just not possible?

In relation to the letter of 22 December 2011, which advised of the requirements that were put in place, you told us that you were assured that action was taken. Therefore, can we take it that we can be assured that the taps in the Royal were checked and found to be bacteria-free but that, after the deaths in the Royal, they were found to be infected? Is that the situation and, if it is, what does it say about initial inspection?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for his question. His first question related to the potential for the bacteria to mutate. I can clarify that the evidence is that it does not mutate, that it is a different strain of pseudomonas and that, therefore, the infection did not come from Altnagelvin to Belfast. A stand-alone infection happened in Belfast.

3.45 pm

I indicated that the trust assured us that it had followed all of the protocols that were indentified. However, we have to test all those things in due course. It is too early for us to identify all the answers to all of the questions. We will seek to clarify the question that the Member asked and request that information from the trust to see whether we can find the correct answer.

When this is over, the Committee will want to look at it further, and I will want to look at it further. It is important that we all look at it further, not just for the risk of pseudomonas in the future but, perhaps, for other hospital-acquired infections, to ensure that our hospitals are the safest possible places for people to recover when they are ill.

Mr Agnew: I declare an interest. I am due to become a father later this year, and we intend for the baby to be born in the Royal. As a parent, I extend my sympathy to those families who have been affected through the death of their child and, equally, to those whose anxieties for the care of their child have increased. I thank the Minister for his statement and for his answers to questions yesterday. When we attend antenatal appointments at the Royal, the care is exemplary, and I commend the staff there. Equally, I am sure that this has been a difficult time for the staff in the neonatal unit.

In response to a question from Mr McCallister yesterday about the two-week period between the first death and the deep clean, the Minister said:

> *"One death does not constitute an outbreak. It was not until the second death happened that it constituted an outbreak." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 70, p106, col 2].*

Technically, I appreciate that that is the case. However, will the Minister reassure us that, in cases where the pseudomonas bacteria has been detected in units where there are babies or other patients with low immunity, action will be taken immediately and proactively and that, in future, we will not have to wait for action to be taken?

Mr Poots: That is one of the areas where we will be seeking to learn lessons. If there are outbreaks of pseudomonas in future, how do we respond? It is more than unfortunate that this has happened: it is tragic that it has happened. However, it would be very unfortunate if we did not learn lessons from what has happened to ensure that we minimise the prospects of it happening in the future.

Executive Committee Business

Rates (Amendment) Bill: Second Stage

Debate resumed on motion:

> *That the Second Stage of the Rates (Amendment) Bill [NIA 2/11-15] be agreed. — [Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]*

Mr Agnew: It is difficult to move from our previous discussion to this one. However, that is the speed of change in the House.

This is a strange position for me. I welcome the initiative that the Finance Minister is bringing to the House.

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): It is doomed.

Mr Agnew: I double-checked that this is what I want to say. It is rare for the Minister and me to agree. This is a progressive measure and one that my party supports. I do not know; maybe in my former days at Grosvenor, you planted something, and it is affecting my rational thought.

As I said, this is a policy that my party supports. Although we do not always agree on economic issues, this is one on which we can. In fact, my predecessor, Mr Brian Wilson, was, like Mr Sammy Wilson, an economics teacher in his former days, and this is a measure that he has called for for some time. I know that he is equally grateful to see this being brought in.

As Members will know, and as was mentioned in previous contributions, we are only too aware of how many of our small retailers are suffering due to the economic difficulties and the impact that out-of-town shopping has had on our town centres. It is important that we ensure that our indigenous businesses, and, indeed, our local economy, are as resilient as they possibly can be in times of economic distress. The measure is helpful in that regard.

Town centres are key in a number of respects, including economically, as they can provide jobs to local workers. Retail is a sector facing many challenges, particularly with online shopping. As I mentioned, our town centres face the difficulties posed by the increase in out-of-town shopping. However, town centres are a vital part of our economic community and, indeed, our social community. Town centres provide something that out-of-town shopping, and certainly internet shopping, never can; that is, the sense of community that they bring. It is about walking into a shop that you live near, knowing the local shopkeepers and having the personal relationship that you do not always get with the larger multinational stores. Town centres are also important environmentally, an area that I know is close to the Minister's heart. We do not want to go down the road, no pun intended, that America seems to have gone down, where, to get a pint of milk or a loaf of bread, people have to get into their cars. It should be the case that we can still go into our town centres, if we live close by, and walk to get those daily items.

That is a concern in the town that I live in now, Bangor. Bangor may be facing the situation in which there is no longer a local grocer's in the town centre. That is regrettable. There is no doubt that, if that does happen — I hope it does not, and I certainly do not want to talk down any local businesses — that will be part of the impact that out-of-town shopping has had on the town centre.

As has been highlighted, this is a short-term measure. I am interested in hearing from the Minister what proposals he may have beyond the life of the legislation. Equally, however, I welcome the period for which the measure will be introduced. As I said, I believe it is a progressive measure. However, we should take the opportunity to look at the rating system as a whole and at a wider review. There are other measures that we could take to improve things for our town centres and local retailers, and for the other small businesses which, as many Members mentioned, this legislation will not necessarily benefit.

Rates are one of the few economic levers we have in Northern Ireland, given that we do not have tax-varying powers. It is key that we ensure that we use rates to provide a progressive system and ensure that those with the broadest shoulders do indeed bear the greatest burden. As I said, I think the legislation does that.

What next? This is a short-term measure, and I appreciate that it has come at a time when we have economic difficulties. However, we should be looking at how we can support our small businesses and our independent retail sector in the long term. The Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association has proposed other measures, including a parking levy on out-of-town supermarkets. I would be interested to hear the Minister's views on that. I am sure that he will also welcome with open arms proposals for a green rating system to incentivise energy efficiency in our buildings and reward businesses that are being proactive on that front. I would be interested in hearing the Minister's views on that as well.

Equally, I would be interested to know if the Minister is willing or intending to look at the domestic rating system to ensure that it is progressive and that those with the broadest shoulders bear the biggest burden when it comes to domestic rates. Unfortunately, that is not the case now. We have a situation in which those of us who own modest homes are subsidising the rates of those in million-pound mansions. In my view, and in the view of the Green Party, that is unacceptable. I find it hard to understand the justification for it. We have a rates cap that is, essentially, a rates relief for the wealthy. That is hard to justify at any time, but particularly at a time when families are struggling through economic difficulties. I am incredulous that that has not been addressed. Although the Minister and his party have made much of the fact that they have kept rates down and spoken of the benefits that, in their view, that has brought, I have yet to hear justification for what I see as a rates relief for the wealthy.

I look forward to considering the Rates (Amendment) Bill in further detail. That is what we are here for today. At the risk of bringing the Minister's good name into disrepute and, indeed, causing harm to my reputation, I support him in introducing the measures, and I commend him for the strong stance he has taken in respect of the supermarkets' response to the measures.

Mr Wilson: I thank the Members who have taken part in the debate, including those who have insulted me —and that includes the Member who has just spoken. I assure him

that his allying himself with a measure that I introduce is more likely to do damage to me than it is to do damage to him. He can throw around insults that this is a progressive measure. That was nearly as bad as Mr Bradley's allegation that this was a socialist measure. I do not mind the Bill being attacked in the way that Mr Allister attacked it, but I take exception to my personal integrity being impugned in this way. I wish to answer some of those points as I go through my response to the debate.

The contributions made during the Second Stage have shown that there is widespread support for the Bill in the House. Despite what some have said about the use of accelerated passage, I do not think that anyone has not had the opportunity to raise the points they were required to raise and wanted to raise in whatever detail they wanted to raise them. I hope that I will be able to go through the points that have been raised and answer the various issues.

4.00 pm

First, I will address the points made by Mr Murphy, the Chairman of the Committee. Once again, I thank Committee members for their support and their input to the final shape of the Bill. I also thank the Committee for the constructive way in which it complemented the work that was done by my Department, which was extensive, despite the allegations of foot-dragging and a lack of effort. We published a consultation document that was well researched, well presented and well accepted, even by those who were not sympathetic to the proposal. The work that went into that was extensive, and it is part of the reason why we have got to this point. At official level and Committee level, we have had good input to make sure that we have a Bill that is fit for purpose.

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

Mr Murphy raised a number of issues, which I will go through. The first issue he raised was the evaluation of the current rate relief scheme. He asked why we were separating that from the evaluation of the scheme that is being introduced. There will be an evaluation of the existing small business rate relief scheme during 2012-13. The expanded relief scheme will be evaluated during the 2014-15 rating year. In that evaluation — this may address a point that a number of Members raised — we will also be looking at how effective the scheme has been, looking at it in the context of the revaluation exercise that will have taken place, and looking at the alternatives that we may have to consider for the long term. As I mentioned earlier, this is not a problem that is going to go away: it has been exacerbated by the recession, which is why the Executive wanted to bring this measure through so quickly. There is a long-term problem as well because of changes in shopping habits, etc.

Mr Murphy also asked why we were not imposing the levy on large banks, which was a common theme in the speeches of a number of Members. The first thing I want to make clear is that we did not want to introduce a policy that was at odds with other Executive policies. Banks were not the only businesses mentioned as ones that should have the increased levy applied to their premises; we also had queries as to why hotels, airports and manufacturing industries were not included. In all those cases, if the levy had been applied, it would have been rather odd for the Executive to invest money, effort and time to get investment in those sectors while trying to raise additional levies from them.

Many of the high street banks would not have been affected by the levy. Indeed, the complaint was that some of the retail banks on the high street might have actually qualified for the benefits of the small business rate relief scheme, and we have excluded them in response to the Committee's raising the issue. We have taken those banks, as one of the multiples, out of the scheme, which shows that the work of the Committee and the consultation produced changes to the scheme. However, many of those that would have been included, such as Citibank, the Santander call centres and the New York Stock Exchange, are companies that we have spent a huge amount of effort to attract to Northern Ireland. To impose the additional burden on them would have been at odds with the policy of the Executive.

Mr Murphy also raised the issue, as did the Committee, of why the levy was not being imposed on utilities. One issue with utilities, as opposed to retailers, is that they are monopolists and are not, therefore, subject to the same competition as the retail sector. At a time when we are trying to deal with fuel poverty, it would have been easy for the utilities to pass on any increase in the levy to consumers. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment advised us that it would be unlikely that the Utility Regulator, even if the matter had been referred, could have challenged passing on that increase on the grounds of general efficiency. For that reason, I believe that we were correct in exempting utilities from the scheme.

I think that Mr Cree, who is not in his place, engaged in a cunning plan to try, as Mr Allister pointed out, to cause dissension in the ranks of the DUP. He referred to me as the First Minister, and, as Mr Allister pointed out, the First Minister quickly emerged just to check that there had not been a coup d'état sponsored by the Ulster Unionist Party. The fact that he left very quickly with a smile on his face was an indication that I was able to assure him that Mr Cree had made a mistake or was trying to cause mischief in which I had no part. I am glad that the First Minister is in his place to hear that assurance once again and will leave completely satisfied that I am an innocent party in the plot hatched by the Member for North Down.

I am sorry that Mr Cree is not in his place because I would like him to hear what I have to say. Although supportive, he raised the issue of why the levy does not apply to a wider range of business sectors. I noted, however, that he did not mention the other business sectors to which the levy should apply. Some Members at least suggested certain sectors to which it might have been applied. It is one thing to say that the levy could have been spread and, therefore, made less onerous on businesses that have been targeted; it is another thing, however, to say where the increase should have applied.

Mr Cree also raised the issue of business improvement districts. I do not see the levy being a matter of either/or. Business improvement districts are, of course, a totally different kettle of fish from the measures being proposed here. The money would be raised locally, and the decision on how to spend it would be made locally. Business improvement districts would involve a very small amount of money, usually about a 1% increase in rates. Of course, in contrast to the scheme proposed today, that money would

not be spent on helping particular businesses. Rather, it would be used to improve the general appearance of an area. The legislation for business improvement districts is being taken forward by the Minister for Social Development. Some larger businesses have said that they expect to be major contributors to that and, therefore, felt it unfair that they were also being asked to pay a levy. However, given the timing, there should be no overlap, as an assurance has been given that the levy is a three-year measure. Business improvement districts will not be operational for some time, and their role will be different to that of the levy on large retailers.

Mr Cree was among several Members who raised the issue of how the levy will impact on job creation and whether it will result in job losses. Again, I have listened to anyone who wanted to speak to me about the levy. Everyone, including the large stores, had that opportunity, and we discussed the issue extensively. I listened to claims about job and investment losses, and I will not enter that controversy again, other than to restate that the levy represents, on average, a tax amounting to 0·19% of the turnover of large stores, which is less than one fifth of 1%. Many large stores boast that they have worked their way through the recession, because that is what their shareholders want to hear. They cannot assure their shareholders that they have weathered the recession fairly well and that sales and profits are up and, at the same time, say that the levy will be devastating. Indeed, one large store, and I am not going to mention its name, came to see me and told me that a levy of, I think, £76,000 would mean that it would have to make more than a dozen redundancies. If that were the case, they were paying well below the minimum wage. So, we have to be very careful about such over-egged claims. I have no doubt that this measure will be used as an excuse for some economic decisions that firms would have made anyway. We have to put things in context.

Another point that I would make to Mr Cree is that, as a result of the consultation, some large stores that may have a huge area but low sales per square foot came and made a strong case. The very reason that we dropped the levy from 20% to 15% was because we wanted to help some of them with the kind of burden that they said this would impose on them. I will come to Mr Allister's contribution in a moment, but one of the contradictions in his argument was that he said that this was unfair to some stores because of the nature of their business. Yet, he was the one who advocated a graduated tax in which the larger the valuation the higher the percentage increase should be. If that were the case, some stores with the lowest sales per square foot would have been paying even bigger bills. However, we listened to the arguments made by stores. We looked at the ways in which the revenue is being raised, and we responded by bringing the levy down to 15%.

Mr Bradley accused me of being a socialist and of introducing a measure that was reflective of socialist principles. Of course, he has misunderstood. This is to make the free market work better. This is to save the wide range of businesses in the free market. I regard this as a very measured and, I suppose, conservative measure when it comes to the retailers.

Mr Humphrey: But not with a capital "c", Sammy.

Mr Wilson: No, not with a capital "c".

I want to clarify a number of things. First, the small business rate relief will apply to all types of businesses, not just retailers; I think that Mr Bradley misunderstood that. As a result, 8,300 businesses will benefit from the measure, and about 50% of those will be retailers. He also raised the issue of alternatives and effective means of supporting businesses. As I said, in the evaluation that will take place, we will look at what alternatives there should be, and especially at what will then have been the general revaluation, and we will see how that has affected the relative rate burdens for different kinds of businesses. That is probably the best time to reassess the effectiveness, because we may well find that even after the general revaluation there are still problems that we need to address, and, as the Executive, we will have to look at some of those issues for the longer run.

Judith Cochrane raised the issue of the levy's not applying to all businesses, and I think I answered that point. Mr Elliott raised the issue of the size of the benefits. I thought that it was rather churlish of him to suggest that it would be ineffective because the size of the benefits would, in his view, be quite small in relation to the total overheads of properties. Over the next three years the average business will benefit from a reduction of between £2,000 and £3,000 in its rates. Maybe he should have listened to what businesses and business organisations had to say. They accepted that, even in the current climate, that kind of reduction in the overheads of some small businesses will be significant and will help. I am not holding out the Bill as a panacea. It is only one of the measures that the Executive are undertaking to try to help businesses in the current recession, but it is a valuable contribution to the work that needs to be done.

4.15 pm

I will now deal with the points that Mr Allister raised in his contribution. I am glad to see that the measure has united the main parties in the Assembly and has split the dissidents who sit in the corner. Mr Agnew is at odds with Mr Allister today — I have split the opposition in two. That is another benefit of the measure on top of the benefits to small businesses.

Mr Allister raised a number of issues, some of which were trivial and others, as part of the line-by-line scrutiny of the Bill, that deserve to be answered. I was saying to Simon Hamilton that I do not know whether the hundreds of businesses in Ballymena that will benefit from the measure have the support of their representative or will find their representative opposing it. It is one thing for Mr Allister to raise queries, but there were contradictions throughout his contribution. He said that I was attacking big business and that I was not doing enough for small businesses. It is an important function for Members to come here and query legislation. That is the whole point of debate here. As a Minister, I do not want to run away from that. If there are things that need answered and justified, of course I shall do that. However, you cannot have the luxury of sitting on both sides of the argument simply picking holes in one direction and then in the other. That was the sum total of his contribution.

He said that there was no justification for the Bill because, had the Executive been doing their job, we would not be in this situation. Mr Allister showed a total lack of

understanding of the rating system: he said that we were quite happy to keep going with a system that had inequity built into it because, somehow or other, it meant that the Executive gained rates that we should not have got. The argument went that, had there been a general revaluation, we would not have had the problem. However, he said that we were taking money when we should not be taking it and that we are getting additional rate revenue as a result of not having the revaluation. He made the point, but I think that he knows full well how weak that point is, because even if we had a revaluation, the pot of money that we still want to obtain would be similar. Let us say that, as a result of the recession, all the valuations went down by 50%. That would not mean that the rates bill would go down by 50%; it would simply mean that the charge per pound would go up. We would still be after the same pot of money. The lack of revaluation and the delay in the revaluation has not —

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: I will give way in a moment. It has not led to the Executive getting more money. The Executive have decided how much more money they want through the regional rate and have then set that rate on the basis of revaluation. It may have changed the relative amounts of money that people pay, but that is the whole point of the scheme. Had there been a revaluation, some of the bigger stores would have had a larger NAV than that which they have at present and some of the smaller stores would have had a smaller one, as a result of which you would have had a redistribution. That is what the scheme is designed to do. I give way.

Mr Allister: I was exactly making the point that a general revaluation would give a more equitable redistribution of the rates burden across the board. I entirely understand that. However, this is an ad hoc approach. Instead of undertaking a general revaluation, which, across all interests, would give a proper or more acceptable redistribution of the rates burden, this picks and chooses parts of it and does not deliver the same equity as a general revaluation.

Mr Wilson: That is a different point from the one that I was making. Indeed, I noted down the point that was made, which is that we were seeking to bring in additional money as a result of not having the revaluation. Let me deal with the Member's second point. He asked why we have not had a revaluation. Is it some cunning plot by the Executive? Is it simply the case that the Executive are being lethargic and could not care? By the way, the decision was actually made on my recommendation to the Executive. I am not running away from that. Although I talk about the Executive all the time, I am not trying to pass the blame in any way.

There were good sound reasons for that decision. The first is that the impression was given that, had there been a revaluation, there would have been an instant changeover. A revaluation exercise takes a considerable period: at least two years. Therefore, there was no instant remedy; hence the reason for introducing a Bill, which, although it is blunt — I accept that — seeks to reflect some of the changes that we know would have happened had there been a revaluation.

The second point is that a revaluation at the time to which the Member referred — over the past couple of years — would have taken place when the property market in Northern Ireland was at its most turbulent. Indeed, I suspect that, had we done a revaluation two years ago, people would be sitting here in the Assembly saying that it was unfair and that, although it reflected the situation at that time, the situation had moved so quickly during the past two years that it no longer reflects it. Therefore, an expensive exercise would have been undertaken and an outcome reached that would, because of the turbulence in the market, not have produced a result that gave stability or that could have lasted until the next valuation.

Indeed, all the evidence and information that was given to me — there are basic international standards set down for revaluations — indicated that, had we carried out a revaluation in those circumstances, it would have flouted those basic economic valuation standards, would have been unreliable and inconsistent, and would have given rise to challenges and appeals. In that situation, it did not, in my view, make sense to go for a general revaluation. It was not some cunning ploy by the Executive to get more money from businesses. It was simply the case that it could not be done at that particular time.

Mr Allister's next argument was that there is some kind of contradiction in the policy: on one hand, we want to woo large businesses; on the other, we want to kick them. He argued that we are putting a lot of effort into reducing corporation tax and, at the same time, increasing the levy on large businesses. Somehow or other, we are sending out contradictory messages by trying to hurt large businesses while claiming that we want to help them. I want to make something very clear, which I have made clear to all of the businesses that have come to see me: the Bill is not an attack on big business, despite the way some people have tried to paint it. We want to see big, medium-sized and small businesses doing well in Belfast, in Northern Ireland and throughout the country. We need that mix of businesses.

Some businesses have weathered the recession better than others. They admit that. House of Fraser boasted in the 'Belfast Telegraph' that, out of its 67 stores across the world, the one in Belfast is its fifth best-performing. Tesco has argued that, even with the difficult climate over the past number of years, it has increased its share of the market. While many small businesses are struggling, Tesco has increased its sales and profits. Therefore, the levy is not a measure to hit big businesses, or, as some people have tried to paint the situation, an Executive vendetta against big businesses. It is simply a recognition that some businesses have done better than others, and, if you are going to help businesses and fill in the gap between now and a revaluation and address some of the disparities that have arisen, you give that help.

Mr Allister had only finished saying that we are attacking big business when he dismissed the idea. I enjoy debate, and it is good that Members challenge issues, but at least let us have some sense. On the one hand, it is being said that we are kicking the daylights out of big business with the levy, and, on the other hand, the scheme is dismissed because it will raise only a paltry £5 million. It is either an imposition designed to hurt big business, or it is worth nothing. People cannot have it both ways.

It was said that the Executive squander money on spin doctors and dinners and that I was looking for people to spend £40 million only this time last week. If we manage

our budgets well and finish up at the end of the year with an unspent £40 million that we can carry over to face the problems of next year, that should not be derided. It should be regarded as good financial management, which is what we have achieved.

Equally, it is easy to say let us just find all the money ourselves. At Budget time last year, when everybody was telling us that we needed to raise more revenue and that there were huge pressures on all Departments, the Executive took the decision that if we were to help small businesses, we would have to raise money through alternative means because we did not have it in our resources at that time. That helped to redress an imbalance that existed because of not having a revaluation.

The sum may be only £5 million, but that £5 million is designed to rebalance and to finance. In this job, I have found that it is not only the large sums of money that need to be considered. Often, many small sums of money from the pot can make huge differences in various sectors of the economy. Therefore, the £5 million should not be disparaged in the way that it has been.

I have shown that if we had gone for graduation — that is, the bigger the NAV, the bigger the percentage that is paid — companies such as IKEA and B&Q would have been hit much harder. We asked about graduation during the consultation, and there was no real support for it among respondees, although such a scheme would probably have benefited companies such as Tesco, Sainsbury's, and so on. However, given that the levy is 8·5p in the pound, companies with a larger NAV will pay a larger bill. That in itself is a form of graduation.

Questions were asked about why the levy was being targeted at retailers only. Mr Allister mentioned driving past large retailers and car showrooms and wondering why they are exempt. One reason why car showrooms are exempt is that those businesses do more than simply sell cars. They have garages, repair shops and offices, and they also service vehicles. This is designed to look at the retail sector. For that reason, car showrooms are exempt.

4.30 pm

Mr Allister raised the issue of uncertainty because of the fact that we have set the rate for this year but have said that we do not know what it will be in the next number of years as we have not set it for years 3 and 4. I thought that I had explained the reason for that reasonably well in my speech at the very start. However, Mr Allister said that it would lead to great uncertainty — another exaggeration, of course — because businesses would not know how it would impact on their bill. Let me, again, put it into some context. First, we have set the levy at 15%. Half of the bill will not change anyway because we have frozen the regional rate. However, district rates will change, and we will not, therefore, be able to work out what the bill is until we know what the district rate is for council areas in years 3 and 4. The local council rate has increased by, on average, 2% or 3% a year; indeed, it has been coming down. If that trend continues, this will raise the rate from about 8·5p in the pound to slightly over 9p in the pound by the end of the period. I hardly think that that is likely, because it will be 15% of, say, an average 2% increase each year. I see the Member raising his eyebrows and thinking, "How did you get that figure?". That will not mean that a huge amount of extra money has to be found. Saying that we have left it so open that it creates uncertainty is — I hope that Members can see this — a straw argument that really does not have any justification.

On the issue of modification, Mr Allister pointed out in, I think, clause 1(4) that the Department can vary the definitions. I cannot remember the exact clause that he was referring to. I have no doubt that people will attempt to avoid falling under the Bill's remit, and, should that be the case, definitions may have to be changed. I do not expect us to use it, but that clause is there simply to ensure that we have the flexibility to deal with the issue, should it arise.

Mr Allister has two issues with clause 2. First, he wants to know what we mean by:

> *"the window display … does not identify, a trade or business".*

The whole idea of that is to stop people getting free advertising. It is to prevent, for example, a Spar shop from extending its sign over an empty shop next door and getting free advertising by maybe using the shop window for displaying goods. If that were proper advertising, it would, of course, come under the Bill and be subject to rates. So it is really to stop empty shops being used for display purposes, which creates free advertising for adjacent businesses.

When the Chamber of Commerce came to talk to us about the issue, it suggested that a lot of the art colleges and whatnot could put on window displays that would give a street frontage a lively appearance and look better than a shutter over an empty window but would not be related to the business next door. That is the other extreme. That is the type of display that would be accepted. However, simply wanting to extend what is on show to the shop next door would not be accepted. There will be an in-between area that will be subjective, and I am sure that there will be challenges.

Mr Allister also raised the issue of the window display not exceeding 5% of the floor area and asked how we came up with that and why we even bothered mentioning it. That was really as a result of our consultation with RICS and the commissioner.

I am sure that plenty of businesses will look for every opportunity in the legislation that will allow them to carry on with activities in particular premises without paying rates. We want to ensure that only window displays are used and that, for example, people do not use half of their shop for storage and claim that that is part of their shop display. As a result, we have designated that only a certain percentage of shops can be used for displays. That will stop anybody arguing that, although they have gone 20 ft into a shop, it is part of the window display. The decision was taken in consultation with some of those who will be engaged in valuation exercises.

The Member asked, finally, why we have only allowed retail premises in respect of freshly occupied premises that have only been empty for one year. Again, that decision was taken after consultation. If retailers move into empty premises, they will probably require a fair amount of capital investment to fit them out with shelves etc. We want to avoid people moving into empty shops and getting a rates-free period and then moving into another empty shop and getting another rates-free period. That is harder to achieve in the

retail sector because of all the set-up and capital costs, but offices are not the same. There are not the same fitting-out costs associated with offices; a couple of desks and telephones are all that is needed. There is much more room for abuse with offices, which is why we have designated the measure for retail only.

I hope that my comments address a lot of the issues that Mr Allister raised. I hope that he will be able to say, without contradiction, that this is, at least, a genuine measure by the Executive. He should give the Executive a bit of credit because we have looked at a problem and sought to sort it out. Over the period of the consultation, the work of the Committee and the drafting of the legislation, we have sought to honestly draft legislation that covers much of the required detail and make it as foolproof as possible.

Finally, I want to come to Mr Agnew, who described the legislation as progressive. The word "progressive" usually means something that is really left wing and like the socialist stuff that Mr Bradley talked about. Perhaps Mr Agnew was trying to besmirch my good name by saying that.

Mr Hamilton: He will vote against the Bill now.

Mr Wilson: After hearing some of the comments that I have made, he probably will vote against it. I welcome the fact that he has not been churlish and has accepted that this is a genuine attempt by the Executive to address a problem that he and other Members will have seen in the town centres in their constituency. Like others, he rightly said that the measure is short-term and asked what will happen after the period set out in the legislation. All I can do is assure him that we will work on that.

The Executive are working at many levels. Some think that the Executive are only trying to help smaller business through this measure, but the Executive are doing numerous things. Arlene Foster in DETI and Stephen Farry in DEL are providing training and employment packages for those who work in shops, and Nelson McCausland in DSD is working on regeneration schemes in town centres. The Executive are pouring a lot of money into trying to revive our town centres and to keep them alive, and I do not want this Bill to be seen in isolation. As we look beyond the legislation, other measures may be required, and we will look at them. I believe that this is a longer-term project, rather than one that is just for the next three years.

The measure is for three years, and assurance has been given that that is the case. It will require renewal, and, if whoever is Minister at that stage decides that he or she wants to continue with it, there will be the same opportunity for scrutiny by the Assembly, and justification for its continuation will have to be given. I hope that we will have moved on by that stage with a revaluation and that we will have some new ideas about what we can do for small businesses.

I thank all Members who took part in the debate and listened to my response. I ask the Assembly to support the Second Stage of the Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before we proceed to the Question, I remind Members that section 63 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 applies to the Bill. The vote, therefore, requires cross-community support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

> *That the Second Stage of the Rates (Amendment) Bill [NIA 2/11-15] be agreed.*

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am satisfied that cross-community support for the Bill has been demonstrated. That concludes the Second Stage of the Rates (Amendment) Bill.

Committee Business

Standing Orders

Mr Deputy Speaker: The House will know that motions to amend Standing Orders are not time-limited.

Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee on Procedures): I beg to move

After Standing Order 42 insert –

"42A. Legislative Consent Motions

(1) A legislative consent motion is a motion which seeks the agreement of the Assembly to the United Kingdom Parliament considering provisions of a Bill which deal with a devolution matter.

(2) A legislative consent memorandum shall be laid in respect of any devolution matter for which a legislative consent motion is proposed.

(3) A legislative consent memorandum may include the Bill and any explanatory notes attached to the Bill and shall include -

(a) a draft of the legislative consent motion;

(b) sufficient information to enable debate on the legislative consent motion;

(c) a note of those provisions of the Bill which deal with a devolution matter; and

(d) an explanation of –

(i) why those provisions should be made; and

(ii) why they should be made in the Bill rather than by Act of the Assembly.

(4) The Minister whom the devolution matter concerns shall, normally not later than 10 working days after the relevant day, either -

(a) lay a legislative consent memorandum before the Assembly; or

(b) lay a memorandum before the Assembly explaining why a legislative consent motion is not sought.

(5) A member of the Assembly other than the Minister whom the devolution matter concerns may lay a legislative consent memorandum but shall not do so until -

(a) the Minister has laid a legislative consent memorandum under paragraph (4)(a);

(b) the Minister has laid a memorandum under paragraph (4)(b); or

(c) the 10 working days provided for in paragraph (4) have expired.

(6) Upon a legislative consent memorandum being laid before the Assembly, those provisions of the Bill dealing with a devolution matter shall stand referred to the appropriate statutory committee unless the Assembly shall order otherwise.

(7) The committee may, within 15 working days from the date of referral, consider those provisions of the Bill which deal with a devolution matter and report its opinion thereon to the Assembly.

(8) A legislative consent motion shall not normally be moved until at least -

(a) 5 working days after publication of the committee report; or

(b) 20 working days after the date of referral to the committee.

(9) A subsequent legislative consent motion may be moved if appropriate, having regard to the nature of any amendment dealing with a devolution matter made, or proposed to be made, to the Bill. Paragraphs (4) to (8) shall not apply to that motion.

(10) In this order a 'devolution matter' means -

(a) a transferred matter, other than a transferred matter which is ancillary to other provisions (whether in the Bill or previously enacted) dealing with excepted or reserved matters;

(b) a change to –

(i) the legislative competence of the Assembly;

(ii) the executive functions of any Minister;

(iii) the functions of any department.

(11) In this order the 'relevant day' means -

(a) in respect of a Bill other than a Private Member's Bill -

(i) the day the Bill is introduced in the United Kingdom Parliament; or

(ii) the day the Bill completes the stage in the United Kingdom Parliament during which an amendment is made to the Bill which makes it a Bill to which this order applies;

(b) in respect of a Bill which is a Private Member's Bill -

(i) the day the Bill completes the first stage at which it may be amended in the House of the United Kingdom Parliament in which it was introduced; or, if later,

(ii) the day the Bill completes the stage in the United Kingdom Parliament during which an amendment is made to the Bill which makes it a Bill to which this order applies.

(12) This order does not apply in respect of Bills which are consolidation Bills or Statute Law Revision Bills."

Thank you, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I panicked there: I thought that the Clerk would have to read out the wording of the motion, in which case we would be here longer than the debate will take.

On behalf of the Committee on Procedures, I am pleased to bring this motion to amend Standing Orders to the House. The proposed changes stem from an inquiry into legislative consent motions (LCMs) carried out by the Committee on Procedures in the previous mandate. The Committee's key recommendation was that a Standing Order should be put in place to set out the procedure for dealing with LCMs.

It may be helpful if I begin by providing some background to the need for the new Standing Order. Legislative consent relates to the convention that the British Government would not normally legislate on devolved matters without first getting the agreement of the relevant devolved legislature. Back in 2000, the British Government and the devolved

Administrations agreed a memorandum of understanding that set out the principles underlying the process.

A legislative consent motion is the means by which the Assembly gives its consent to a Westminster Bill that deals with a devolved matter. The Assembly dealt with 18 LCMs in the whole of the previous mandate, but we have already had six LCMs in this mandate. Therefore, there is a clear need to have proper procedures in place. The Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales have Standing Orders in place to deal with LCMs. However, there are no agreed procedures in the Assembly for dealing with them.

Research carried out by the Committee on Procedures in the previous mandate showed that, other than those from the relevant Committee, very few Members contributed to debates on LCMs. Although the procedures used up until now have been adequate, they were Executive-driven, and the majority of Members did not have access to the information necessary to allow them to take part effectively in debate and to understand the purpose of the motion. This is an important issue: better access to information for Members will lead to better decision-making. The proposed new Standing Order will help to ensure that there can be increased understanding of the issues. It will also clarify the process and impose specific responsibilities on Ministers and Committees. In developing the new Standing Order, the Committee consulted widely with those involved with LCMs, including officials from OFMDFM and the Clerks of Committees that have dealt with such motions in practice.

I now turn to the text of proposed Standing Order 42A. In a nutshell, the basic procedure set out is that an LCM, accompanied by a legislative consent memorandum, is laid before the Assembly. The matter is referred to the appropriate Committee, which may or may not, as it sees fit, report on it. The Assembly then votes on the LCM. The process has been informed by the procedure for Assembly Bills and draws on the Scottish Parliament's procedures for dealing with LCMs.

4.45 pm

The Standing Order addresses important issues, including the fact that a Member or a Minister may wish to lay an LCM; the period within which a Committee may report on a devolved matter contained in a Westminster Bill; the period within which an LCM may be tabled, given the likelihood that it would be largely informed by the passage of a Bill through Westminster; and, finally, the need for the Minister or Member dealing with the matter either to table an LCM setting out why it is better to deal with the matter at Westminster or to lay a memorandum explaining why an LCM is not being sought.

The Standing Orders will bring into effect a key recommendation from the previous Committee's report that Standing Orders should be introduced to provide clarity on the procedures for LCMs. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker: No one else has indicated that they wish to speak in the debate. Before we proceed to the Question, I remind Members that the motion requires cross-community support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

After Standing Order 42 insert –

"42A. Legislative Consent Motions

(1) A legislative consent motion is a motion which seeks the agreement of the Assembly to the United Kingdom Parliament considering provisions of a Bill which deal with a devolution matter.

(2) A legislative consent memorandum shall be laid in respect of any devolution matter for which a legislative consent motion is proposed.

(3) A legislative consent memorandum may include the Bill and any explanatory notes attached to the Bill and shall include -

(a) a draft of the legislative consent motion;

(b) sufficient information to enable debate on the legislative consent motion;

(c) a note of those provisions of the Bill which deal with a devolution matter; and

(d) an explanation of –

(i) why those provisions should be made; and

(ii) why they should be made in the Bill rather than by Act of the Assembly.

(4) The Minister whom the devolution matter concerns shall, normally not later than 10 working days after the relevant day, either -

(a) lay a legislative consent memorandum before the Assembly; or

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(5) A member of the Assembly other than the Minister whom the devolution matter concerns may lay a legislative consent memorandum but shall not do so until

(a) the Minister has laid a legislative consent memorandum under paragraph (4)(a);

(b) the Minister has laid a memorandum under paragraph (4)(b); or

(c) the 10 working days provided for in paragraph (4) have expired.

(6) Upon a legislative consent memorandum being laid before the Assembly, those provisions of the Bill dealing with a devolution matter shall stand referred to the appropriate statutory committee unless the Assembly shall order otherwise.

(7) The committee may, within 15 working days from the date of referral, consider those provisions of the Bill which deal with a devolution matter and report its opinion thereon to the Assembly.

(8) A legislative consent motion shall not normally be moved until at least -

(a) 5 working days after publication of the committee report; or

(b) 20 working days after the date of referral to the committee.

(9) A subsequent legislative consent motion may be moved if appropriate, having regard to the nature of any amendment dealing with a devolution matter made, or

proposed to be made, to the Bill. Paragraphs (4) to (8) shall not apply to that motion.

(10) In this order a 'devolution matter' means -

(a) a transferred matter, other than a transferred matter which is ancillary to other provisions (whether in the Bill or previously enacted) dealing with excepted or reserved matters;

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(iii) the functions of any department.

(11) In this order the 'relevant day' means -

(a) in respect of a Bill other than a Private Member's Bill -

(i) the day the Bill is introduced in the United Kingdom Parliament; or

(ii) the day the Bill completes the stage in the United Kingdom Parliament during which an amendment is made to the Bill which makes it a Bill to which this order applies;

(b) in respect of a Bill which is a Private Member's Bill -

(i) the day the Bill completes the first stage at which it may be amended in the House of the United Kingdom Parliament in which it was introduced; or, if later,

(ii) the day the Bill completes the stage in the United Kingdom Parliament during which an amendment is made to the Bill which makes it a Bill to which this order applies.

(12) This order does not apply in respect of Bills which are consolidation Bills or Statute Law Revision Bills."

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

A24: Ballynahinch Bypass

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes. The Minister will have 10 minutes to respond, and all other Members who are called to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Business Committee for allotting the time to debate this adjournment topic. I thank colleagues for their attendance and the Minister for his attendance and, in advance, his response.

I have not checked, but this may be the first time that an adjournment topic has been debated twice in the Chamber. Many years ago, perhaps a decade or more ago, my good friend Mr Wells brought the same subject to the Chamber. Mr Wells will remember from representing South Down in the 1980s, when it was a much larger constituency than it is now, that this was a hot topic then and even before that. I hope to take on the baton from Mr Wells and bring the issue to the attention of the Regional Development Minister and, hopefully, make more progress. When Mr Wells first raised the issue in the Chamber he did not have a grey hair on his head, and I hope that we can get the issue resolved and the road built before he loses any of the hair on his head. Over that period, the issue has not gone away, to borrow a phrase from someone else. It is a long-standing issue, and, like many bypass projects around Northern Ireland, it has been on the books for many years.

In 2011, I was elected along with my friends Mr Bell, Miss McIlveen and others to represent the town of Ballynahinch. However, you do not need to be elected to serve Ballynahinch or to live there to know that there is a severe traffic problem in the town. Unlike some other places in Northern Ireland in need of a bypass, this is a daily problem; day in and day out, there is a problem with traffic congestion in Ballynahinch. It is a problem between Monday and Friday, caused principally by commuter traffic. It is also a problem at the weekend as traffic tries to make its way to and from the south Down coast and places such as Newcastle and the Mournes. The problem exists from Monday through to Sunday, seven days a week on virtually every day of the year. Therefore, the problem in Ballynahinch is much more acute than it might be in some other parts of Northern Ireland — not to take away from the valid cases that other towns and villages may put forward.

It is not difficult to see why Ballynahinch was settled, sitting where it is slap bang in the heart of County Down. Traffic from Lisburn, Crossgar, Downpatrick, Saintfield, Belfast and Dromore all converges on that tiny town in the centre of County Down, without the appropriate development and infrastructure over the years to accommodate it.

As we debate the bypass, it is coming up to the 5.00 pm rush hour. If you were heading into Ballynahinch at the minute, you might be lucky to have your car stopped in traffic at the Saintfield Road, which is about a mile from the town centre. It can take what seems like an eternity in bumper-to-bumper traffic to get in and through to your destination. I am sure that Mr Wells will make the point that that causes not only congestion but environmental damage to the town and the people living in Ballynahinch.

I want to put forward a number of reasons for the Ballynahinch bypass to progress at the earliest opportunity, the first of which is the strategic importance of the bypass. When Adjournment debate topics are brought by Strangford Members, we tend to be a lonely bunch in the Chamber. There are only a handful of us. We are not used to having any nationalist representation during such a debate, but we can see by the attendance of Ms Ruane that this issue has a much wider context than simply one constituency or town. A huge amount of traffic comes from south Down and through Ballynahinch. Indeed, the proposed line of the bypass project will run in part through and end in south Down. So, the project straddles two constituencies. It is of much wider interest than merely one constituency.

Ballynahinch sits as a gateway not only to many other parts of County Down but principally to the Mournes, which I talked about before. We already see a huge increase in footfall in Newcastle as a result of the fantastic streetscape scheme that went ahead there. I do not want to get stuck into the debate on national parks, but one thing is absolutely clear: the future of the Mournes is such that more and more tourists will want to go there, and that is what we hope to see. Therefore, the traffic that heads down from Belfast and other places and through Ballynahinch will only increase in years to come. So there is a much wider interest and a wider benefit than just the benefit to Ballynahinch. However, the biggest benefit, undoubtedly, will be to Ballynahinch itself. I do not just mean the benefit of getting rid of traffic from the town centre; the future development of Ballynahinch very much depends on the bypass going ahead.

The Department for Regional Development's regional development strategy designates Ballynahinch as a local hub in County Down. The Ards and Down area plan sets aside a lot of hectares for future development, some of which has already gone forward. However, there are about 30 hectares of development ground for around 750 homes, and that development is contingent on the bypass happening. That is the sort of thing that we want to see happening. We need more houses, certainly in places like Ballynahinch. That will also benefit the area. Business will benefit because the bigger the population living there, the more they should use shops and services in the town. So, in a development sense, the bypass is good for Ballynahinch and its business.

The second argument that I want to put concerns the impact that not having the bypass has on business and on the competiveness of businesses in Ballynahinch. I do not just mean the shops, which I will come to in a second. Ballynahinch has a lot of construction, aggregates and manufacturing industry based around it. As everybody here knows, that requires putting a lot of vehicles on the road to get goods to and from the marketplace. I have spoken to many people, particularly in the aggregates sector, who said that, depending on the time of day that they put a vehicle on the road — say it is this time, approaching 5.00 pm or an hour earlier — they would not put out a vehicle because it may not get out and back in time. That comes at a cost to them and affects their competiveness. Day in and day out, the traffic affects the competiveness of businesses in and around Ballynahinch. It also has a huge impact on the shops and other services in the town.

I pay credit to and praise members of the Ballynahinch Regeneration Committee, who have done their best over the years to attract a lot of retail investment to the town. If anybody from outside the area goes to Ballynahinch, they will notice that, for a relatively small town, it has a lot of high street retailers that you would not expect to see. That is because of the good efforts of people in the town, the regeneration committee and local politicians through the years. However, those businesses are undoubtedly suffering. I know that that is not unique to Ballynahinch, Strangford or south Down; it is happening everywhere. It reminds me a lot of my hometown of Comber. Those of us who live in and have represented Comber through the years will know that, before Comber had its bypass, even people from the town would rather have left it and gone somewhere else than venture into it, with all the hassle of the traffic that was there and the headache that that gave people. So it is having an impact even on local people using the shops and services in the town, never mind those who travel through it. If people are commuting back home, perhaps to somewhere in south Down, they may have to stop to get groceries of some kind or another. I think — traders in the town have told me that this is their belief — that, when cars arrive in Ballynahinch, the only thing that is in the mind of the driver is how they can get through the town as quickly as possible. There is no way that they are going to stop there, try to get a car parking space and then try to get back out into the traffic, which might be worse five minutes later. So it is having an impact on businesses, in spite of a lot of good work that is going on, not least in attracting some of those retailers and in the regeneration scheme that DSD is going to bring forward. Indeed, the Minister's predecessor reduced the parking charges in one of the town centre car parks to try to stimulate business in the area. All that is very welcome, but it is clear to those of us who know the town and area that the bypass is the key to unlocking the economic potential of the town.

The third point I want to make is that putting in the bypass will increase road safety. It is easy to say that, and it is a self-evident truth in many respects. If you took all those vehicles away from the town centre, the potential for collisions and accidents would be minimised. When we hear arguments put to the Minister and his officials in Roads Service about traffic-calming schemes, that is always an argument that is put forward. It is also a major consideration. Unfortunately, since the last Adjournment debate on this issue a number of years ago, even in the last two years, there have been two fatal accidents in Windmill Street, which is part of the one-way system around Ballynahinch, involving pedestrians and heavy goods vehicles. There is a concern that there is too much traffic going through the town, and, unfortunately, in the past year it had that impact.

I have also seen buses go through Carlisle Park to get to local schools to pick up schoolchildren. Those are streets in residential areas that were not designed to take the big buses through them, but a sort of unofficial bypass has developed in the town, and the bus drivers have to go that route in order to get to the schools in time to pick up the schoolchildren, otherwise the children would be very late getting home. That is obviously creating a risk, as those buses go through that area on streets that were not designed to take them. There is a real risk there and a fear that something worse might happen.

I bring the issue to the Minister not looking for money per se. If he has any, that is great, but I have been working alongside the Finance Minister for long enough to know how the system operates. I know that the Minister does not have the cash in his budget to bring the project forward now, but I want to make the point that further delay is costing us. The initial budget for the road was around £10 million in 2005. It rose to around £12 million in 2007, and the latest estimated cost is around £30 million. The longer we delay, the more it will cost us. That is another evident truth.

I am not coming here with a begging-bowl approach to the Minister, looking for money, not least because I know that I am not going to get it. I am not saying that we need money and we need it now so that the bypass can be built. I come here to ask the Minister to find it within his powers to complete all the necessary statutory processes as quickly as possible. I know that there are some outstanding. I know that the preferred route status has been picked, but there is an environmental impact assessment, there could be a public inquiry following that, and obviously we will have to make vesting orders at a later stage. That is when the use of finance will probably start to kick in. If we could get through all those statutory processes as quickly as we can, so that the project is sitting on the shelf — so that it is shovel-ready, to use the phrase that we hear quite a lot — then, if finance becomes available, perhaps as a result of reallocations resulting from the A5 issue or, indeed, if it is the start of the next Budget period, the project will be sitting in the Minister's Department ready to go.

The message that I want to leave with the Minister and the Assembly tonight is that the scheme is very worthy. That is clear to anybody who knows or travels through the town. You only have to go to the town once and you will see the problem. There is a hidden impact both on business and commerce in the town and on road safety.

I do not ask the Minister to produce a cheque now, but I ask him to impress upon his officials, if he can, to get all the statutory processes out of the way as quickly as possible so that, when the money becomes available, we do not have any further unnecessary delay.

5.00 pm

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I agree with everything that Simon Hamilton said. I go through Ballynahinch regularly, and that is the slowest part of my journey. Indeed, I will go through it tonight after the Adjournment debate. I thank the Member for bringing the Adjournment debate to the House. I pledge to work with him and, indeed, any other Members from Strangford or South Down in any way possible to ensure that we do everything that we can to get this project completed.

Fáiltím roimh an deis seach-bhóthar A24 Bhaile na hInse a phlé. Feicfidh duine ar bith atá ag tiomáint trí Bhaile na hInse go bhfuil fadhbh mhór ann agus go bhfuil práinn leis an seach-bhóthar seo. Féadann an trácht bheith ina stad ar feadh leath uaire. Tá na moilleanna fada seo ag dul i gcion go mór ar ghnólachtaí an bhaile, go háirithe na mion-díoltóirí.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss the A24 Ballynahinch bypass. Anyone who drives through Ballynahinch will understand that there is a serious problem and an urgent need for the bypass. Traffic can be at a standstill for up to half an hour, sometimes longer. Those lengthy delays have a major impact on businesses in the town — I concur with everything that the previous Member said about that — although that does not stop me. There is a great fish and chipper in the town, and I always try to get some healthy eating in as well.

Ballynahinch is a key gateway to the Mournes; it is the main route from Belfast to the Mournes. It not only causes serious traffic delays for both towns but can lead to significant damage to visitor experiences. We need to unlock the true tourism potential in the area at all different levels. There has been underinvestment in the area in the past. The infrastructure is not what it should be, and we need to ensure that — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: I ask that all Members check that their mobile phones are turned off, please.

Ms Ruane: It might be my mobile phone actually. I am sorry.

This type of flagship development is essential if we are to develop a co-operative approach to both trade and tourism. It would make south Down a much more accessible tourist destination as well as improving the quality of life of the many commuters who travel further north. The bottom line is that Ballynahinch should be given a bypass as quickly as possible as part of an overall strategy to improve access to and from south Down.

I understand that work is under way to develop this scheme for the Ballynahinch bypass; work to identify the preferred route is ongoing as we speak. Sinn Féin is fully supportive of the scheme, as is recognised by the assurance given by the previous Sinn Féin Minister, Conor Murphy, that the Ballynahinch bypass would be looked at by the Department for Regional Development. Our local councillors have been very active on the issue, and I welcome their work. I also join Mr Hamilton in paying tribute to the Ballynahinch Regeneration Committee.

I understand the economic circumstances that the Minister and his Department face, but this has been ongoing for too long. I agree that we should have it ready to go. I ask the Minister to ensure that all the statutory processes are completed so that it is ready to go if funding becomes available in this term and, failing that, for funding to be made available in the next Budget settlement. I look forward to working with all partners on the matter.

Mr Nesbitt: I welcome the opportunity to speak and thank Mr Hamilton for bringing the matter to the House. Yesterday, I spoke in the debate on the future of Strangford lough as a Member for the Strangford constituency. I speak in that capacity again today and make it clear, as I did yesterday, that my comments are informed by the priority that the Assembly and its Executive Committee give to the economy. If the economy really comes first, we must check and double-check everything that we do against its economic impact as well as the more easily measured effects on matters environmental.

I well remember, as a schoolchild, being driven through Ballynahinch en route to the Slieve Donard Hotel in Newcastle, where my paternal grandfather used to spend a couple of weeks every summer, and looking enviously out from the hotel at the golfers on one of the greatest courses on planet earth, Royal County Down. Today, that golf course

is enjoying boom times as high-spending golf tourists flock to the land of the modern golf champions.

Many of those tourists will approach Newcastle through Ballynahinch, and although it would be nice to think that coach-loads of people would park up and that the town would bask in the reflected glory of Rory McIlroy, Graeme McDowell and Darren Clarke, we all know that life does not actually work like that. If we can agree that many golf tourists and others who pass through Ballynahinch will never stop, then we can not only do them a service by offering them a bypass to get them much more agreeably to where they want to be, we can also do something much more positive for the residents and the traders of Ballynahinch; we can clear out of the way those who are not going to stop and make room for those who do want to do business in the town, whether they are residents, students or shoppers.

When I was young, we drove through Ballynahinch to get to Newcastle, but we also drove through Ballymoney to get to Portstewart. Either way, the traffic flow then was not what it is today. Now, it is an inhibitor to the economy and to the traders of Ballynahinch. That statement may appear counter-intuitive, not least when you think how often you hear retail businesses stress the importance of increasing footfall, but if you can never get enough pedestrians passing your shop door, how can it be that you can get too many cars? The answer is that the roads infrastructure is long past its capacity to handle the volume of traffic that passes through Ballynahinch, and the results are all negative.

Although I remain committed to the view that the issues on debate today must be seen primarily through the lens of the economy, it would be wrong not to acknowledge the serious road traffic collisions. Mr Hamilton has most eloquently reminded us of the two recent fatalities in Ballynahinch. It is simple logic to conclude that if roads designed to carry 12,000 vehicles a day are now carrying between 18,000 and 20,000, then the risk of accidents is heightened, especially when those 20,000 vehicles include heavy-duty machinery.

In relation to addressing the economy, it was interesting to accompany the Minister to a meeting with residents and traders in the Market House in Ballynahinch a fortnight ago on the 11 January. I came away with many positive impressions, especially with the input from and commitment of the town traders who are taking the sort of joined-up, common-sense approach that my party favours. In particular, I recall the words of Jackson Charles, who sat quietly absorbing and analysing the information until he delivered what I considered to be the telling statement of the morning. His family has been trading in Ballynahinch for 100 years. When the bypass was first suggested many years ago, he was totally opposed to the idea and implacably against it. Today, his opinion has swung 180 degrees, and he is fully supportive of the bypass. That is because he can look out of his shop window and watch potential customers drive on by because the volume of traffic makes it well nigh impossible to stop.

I commend the Minister for attending that meeting, and for following up so swiftly with what I anticipate will be a very well-received statement in a few minutes' time. It will not be his first well-received statement since he took over the Ministry in May. I also ask him, in the spirit of joined-up and common-sense government, to bear in mind what else we both heard from the traders a fortnight ago; namely their desire that this Assembly brings a focus to promoting the cultural and historical potential of Ballynahinch, including its role in the 1798 rebellion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will you draw your remarks to a close, please?

Mr Nesbitt: I know that the Minister, a man steeped in tradition outside his ministerial duties, thinks of little else.

Mr McCarthy: I thank my colleague Simon for bringing this very important subject to the Floor of the Assembly. I am a bit concerned that his colleague sitting beside him was not able to provide a bypass for Ballynahinch, given all his years of experience. I have not been in politics for as long as Jim Wells has been, but I am delighted to say that I had a hand in the Comber bypass and in the construction of the new bypass from the Portaferry Road to Comber and Belfast. So what has Jim been doing all these years? He can answer that question when he speaks.

It is not that long ago that Simon and I became involved in Ballynahinch. It was included in our constituency only in the last mandate, and it was only about March 2011 that we started to knock doors and visit in Ballynahinch — I speak for myself now — and see its problems. The bypass is one problem, but there are many more; I do not know what Jim has been doing about those either. I suppose that, as time goes on, we will see results as we work together.

I support the proposal for the provision of a bypass for Ballynahinch at the earliest opportunity. I was delighted to hear Minister Danny Kennedy say, on his visit to Ballynahinch last week, that, come 2014, and with a fair wind, the town could see the start of the long-awaited bypass.

There is no doubt, and everyone this evening has agreed, that the severity and volume of the traffic passing up Windmill Street, through The Square and on to other destinations is remarkable. Something should be done to alleviate that ever-growing problem and the inherent road safety issues that it brings. As was said earlier, there have been a number of recent accidents. There was a fatal accident two or three weeks ago when an elderly local lady lost her life trying to cross Windmill Street at The Square. We offer sympathy to her family on that sad loss and hope that we do not have to experience that again.

Local excitement over the Ballynahinch bypass has once again surfaced as the decision of the Southern Government to reduce their contribution to the A5 became known. Money will become available from somewhere and could be used for construction of this much needed bypass. Given the circumstances, it is vital that all the necessary planning, environmental assessments and designs, etc, proceed so that, come 2014 when funding becomes available, work can start. The bypass will be a godsend not only to Ballynahinch and those travelling through it, but, hopefully, also to local contractors and workers, and provide much needed jobs.

I am a wee bit taken aback by Simon Hamilton's reluctance to get into funding. Simon is close to the Finance Minister and may become closer as time goes on. Is he trying to keep an arm's distance from demands that will come from me and others when he is dishing out the money? I am sure that that is not the case, Simon; I am sure that you will look after your own constituency when the time comes.

I am pleased to see local involvement and support for the bypass in Ballynahinch. With plans such as this, there can be anxiety among established local businesses that might fear that the bypass will take away much needed trade from the centre of the town. I congratulate the regeneration group, the chamber of commerce and other groups that are working together to bring this to fruition.

I express gratitude to Minister Kennedy for listening, not that long ago, to the people in Ballynahinch and other towns and refusing to introduce parking charges, which would have undoubtedly put extra pressure on the already hard-pressed retailers of Ballynahinch and other towns.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Will the Member draw his remarks to a close, please?

Mr McCarthy: I listened to the Minister's reply to the question today. Although the work seems to have been completed, I was disappointed that the Minister withheld from Members the preferred route and kept us in suspense. I hope that he will divulge his priority during his contribution this evening.

Mr Wells: When I raised this issue a decade ago, I broke a record for the smallest turnout ever for a late debate at Stormont. There was a grand total of four Members in the Chamber: the Speaker, who had to be there, the Minister for Regional Development, Mr Peter Robinson, who had to be there, P J Bradley and myself. After such a disastrous turnout, I wondered how I would write it up for the local newspaper, the 'Down Recorder'. I thought of an inspired headline, "Mr Wells Speaks to a Hushed Assembly", which would create the impression that there were 107 other MLAs hanging on my every word. We have done slightly better tonight. We have almost double figures, although now we know that it affects two constituencies.

5.15 pm

When I was a rookie MLA elected in South Down in 1998, I was taken in hand by a veteran DUP councillor, the late Tommy Poole, who took me to a spot outside the Millbrook Lodge Hotel in Ballynahinch and showed me the spot where the original plan for the Ballynahinch bypass was to start in the early 1960s. Here we are, 50 years later, and still we have no bypass.

I understand why Mr Hamilton, who is about to be elevated to an extremely important position, does not want to besmirch the debate by talking about money, but I will. The reality is that there could be money. For very legitimate reasons, the A5 project has been put on the long finger, and I understand that that means that there is an extra £400 million available for capital expenditure over the next few years. I suspect that DRD will, quite rightly, claim that it should inherit the bulk of that extra cash because it was hypothecated for roads expenditure. That being the case, it is an ideal vehicle to take that money and use it for simple, easy, non-contentious, non-controversial bypass projects, and they do not come much more non-controversial than Ballynahinch. As far as I am aware, there are few, if any, objectors to the scheme, and there are thousands of traders, residents and commuters who would be delighted if it were announced. Indeed, Mr Kennedy, can I give you assurance? If you announce the start of the bypass in the near future, we will name it after you. We will call it the Kennedy bypass. You will thoroughly deserve it.

However, to be serious, from an environmental point of view, the scheme is a no-brainer. The reality is that there are no habitats or wildlife of any importance along the route. There are a small number of landowners, and the land has been designated in the Ards and Down area plan for the bypass; it has not been built upon. If there were a public inquiry, it would be a very short and sharp affair because there is so much overwhelming public opinion in favour of it.

I understand that the price has rocketed. Indeed, when I saw some of the tender prices that were suggested in response to a question I asked for written answer, I thought that I was in the wrong business. In my tenure as an MLA, the price has risen from £10 million to £28 million. I cannot understand that, because the project has remained the simple straightforward scheme that it always was. I suspect that now is the best possible time to get best value for the taxpayer. I know that there are some savagely low tender prices coming in for construction projects in Northern Ireland. Therefore, if we have a bit of slippage money as the result of the A5, let us take the opportunity to get the scheme moving and get best value for the taxpayers of Northern Ireland. It could not come at a better time.

I concur with everything that the honourable Member for Strangford Mr Hamilton said with regard to the economic benefits of the scheme. However, if we do not move, I do not want to be standing here in another 50 years — it could happen: a vegetarian diet — still bleating and asking for the scheme to be implemented. If we do not act soon, there is no doubt that the whole economic regeneration of South Down will suffer. I would love to be paid for every hour that I have sat at Carlisle's garage or the Millbrook Lodge Hotel, waiting to go through Ballynahinch.

I feel sorry for those who live in the byroads around Ballynahinch. Local people have discovered the little rat runs, such as Grove Road, which can be used to get around Ballynahinch. Those people have to suffer, as hundreds of vehicles — sometimes HGVs — use those roads to avoid the town. The people of Carlisle Park have to suffer buses, lorries and cars piling through that residential area in their hundreds to avoid the snarl-up in Ballynahinch.

This is a no-brainer. It is good for the environment, it is good for the economy and it will be good value for the taxpayer. I urge the Minister to go down as a hero in Ballynahinch and announce real progress with the scheme.

Mr McNarry: It seems that people are sitting in anxious anticipation after a number of these speeches. Simon Hamilton told us that it is on the money; Mike Nesbitt beside me said that we can expect a response in minutes; and drama occurs when Jim Wells has already got round to naming the blooming bypass before it is built. I do not know what brown envelopes are floating your way, Mr Kennedy, but perhaps you will think of others. That is meant to be a joke, in case anybody picks it up any other way. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Nesbitt: You could speak to him privately.

Mr McNarry: Well, you never know.

I am very pleased to support my DUP constituency colleague on this issue. I welcome the debate and trust that the Minister will have positive news in his contribution today. I am very glad that Ballynahinch is now firmly within the Strangford constituency. Maybe that is why we are now

seeing some action. In the past, Ballynahinch has, as far as I am concerned, been marginalised by being on the edge of other places and districts. That that is no longer the case is the positive bit. Along with my colleagues, I will be making strenuous efforts to see that, in and around Ballynahinch, the Ballynahinch people, despite and irrespective of those who pass through it, are in a position where their town will be properly recognised and represented.

Part of the Ballynahinch traffic problem at present is that there are too many direction options available at too many points on existing road networks. They lead to traffic snarl-ups. Skipping immediate junctions, as would happen, prevents local traffic, which really ought to remain on the local road network, from using the bypass and perpetuating the existing problem.

I want to deal with another issue that I believe needs to be looked at. I am glad that the bypass is coming, is being named and so on, but it relates solely to traffic coming from the eastern route. I want to put down a marker to the Minister and tell him of my experience, and that of some others who are here, of Ballygowan. We waited 30 years for the second phase of the Ballygowan bypass, and, Lord, we are going to wait another 30 years for it to be completed. That is an incentive to Simon to find the money for that. What of the other city that is just a few miles from Ballynahinch on the western road network? I refer to Lisburn, which has an urban population in excess of 60,000 and a total population approaching 120,000. The western approaches to Ballynahinch include not only Lisburn, as I have said, but towns such as Dromore, Lurgan, Portadown, Armagh and, of course, nearby Hillsborough. I am not sure that the local road network can handle all those routes. Are there any recent traffic surveys that could shed light on that and on the volume of traffic coming from different regional towns? The bypass will handle eastern route traffic, but what about the western route traffic? That is the question that I pose.

There has been mention that shopkeepers are already having a difficult time. I wonder whether the impacts of the new systems need to be factored into the rating situation. Is this a case for doing that? I ask the Minister whether he will consider sharing in my appeal to the Finance Minister to seriously consider having a rates review well before 2015, so that places such as Ballynahinch can take advantage of that. Many current businesses will be out of business by then, if they do not see concessions in rateable valuations. I make the plea that Ballynahinch in particular needs some assistance in that respect.

Enough has been said, and there is more to be said. I am sure that we all now await the Minister and the Junior Minister.

Mr Bell: Let me clarify that I will be speaking as a Member for Strangford and not as a junior Minister in the Northern Ireland Executive.

Mr McNarry: Oh no, you are not.

Mr Bell: It has to be done.

First, I congratulate Simon Hamilton for keeping the issue alive and for achieving the debate today. He has done it with his customary comprehensive grasp of the detail of a subject that he has elucidated very well. He has not left a lot to be said. I join all my colleagues in the cross-community and cross-party support for this. A lot of hard work is being undertaken, at least by the regeneration group. Last summer, I was in Ballynahinch with Alex Attwood, the Minister at that stage, and we went to the marketplace and looked at the Market House. We looked at all the potential there was and at what could be achieved if we could, as it were, get all our ducks in a row. Critical to all those ducks in a row is, as Simon pointed out to the House, the bypass for Ballynahinch.

By their nature, bypasses are there to serve a trinity of purposes: first, to ensure that congestion is alleviated; secondly, to ensure that there is no interference with the local population, local traffic flow and local businesses; and thirdly, as my colleague Simon Hamilton has pointed out, to ensure road safety. When you take Ballynahinch, with its South Eastern Regional College campus, Assumption Grammar School, the High School, St Colman's High School, Ballynahinch Primary School, St Patrick's Primary School, and all the sporting organisations from rugby to hockey to Ballynahinch Olympic, you will see that there is a need for a comprehensive look at road safety. I venture and dare to suggest that the greatest challenge for Ballynahinch is not only those three purposes but a point that has been made repeatedly — the delivery of the bypass that is key to the economic success of Ballynahinch. That is something that we need to look at.

Ballynahinch has been classified as a small town. The 2001 census, which has the most recent figures I could get, show that it has a population of 5,364 people. Practically one quarter of that population, or 22·4%, is under 16 years of age.

We can look not only to the excellent golf facilities in the area but to the other major towns, such as Downpatrick and Newcastle, which lie there. Each of them has its inherent tourism appeal. We look to 2012 as a year when Northern Ireland can maximise its tourism potential. In fact, we are seeing some evidence of that, and I congratulate DETI. The last figures that I saw show that we are something like 6% up on the same period last year and a spend of around £21·9 million greater than last year, and I believe that there is more to come. It is important that Ballynahinch gets its slice of the cake.

Somebody argued that the town came into being in the 1600s and stayed with the Sir George Rawdon family until 1798 and that the only thing that has not changed since that time is the road structure and congestion. I think that that is unfair, although I note that some of those issues were raised back in 1996, when the British Prime Minister John Major visited Ballynahinch. In 1998, with the establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly, they said that it was hoped that the Ballynahinch bypass would be in place within six to 15 years. By my maths, that gives the Minister two years, until 2013, to fulfil the pledge that was made.

Critical to the issue is ensuring that we have access to the key tourism routes of the Mournes, Royal County Down, Newcastle and Downpatrick. Those routes will be used not only this year but many times into the future. It is critical that Ballynahinch does not lose out as a town. It is reasonable to say that the economic survival of the town is dependent on that. So, Minister, we look to you to see if you can tell us anything about the next steps. The next steps may be the preferred route or the preferred status for that route. We understand that this is an issue that has been about for a while. Like my colleague David McNarry, I would

like you to see if there are any other moneys that could be used to bring this into place. I appreciate that it is a big ask, but it is for a big issue.

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I thank all Members who have contributed to the debate this evening and the main sponsor of the debate, Simon Hamilton. I have been interested in all the speeches and representations that have been made. I not only note the comments but welcome them, as I do the concerns that have been raised. I particularly welcome the opportunity to debate the potential Ballynahinch bypass.

As Members know, I had the opportunity to visit Ballynahinch recently. I met local elected representatives, traders' representatives and council officials, and I was able to see for myself the road network and traffic conditions in the town. Over many years, I have been an occasional visitor as a tourist or as someone passing through the town.

5.30 pm

Traffic surveys were undertaken in 2006, in the early stages of the development of the scheme, which has been about for quite some time. The surveys show that there were over 20,000 vehicles a day on some parts of the main road through the town centre. I confirm that Roads Service is aware of the range of benefits that a bypass may be able to provide.

Although there are between 10,000 and 12,000 vehicles on the A24 trunk road approaching the town, many of those motorists have business in the town centre. Nevertheless, traffic modelling shows that around 6,500 vehicles a day might be expected to use a new bypass, which would make a significant contribution to the improvement of traffic conditions, and conditions generally, in the town centre, where, for example, the pollution associated with traffic congestion would be reduced. Mention was also made of that.

The A24 Ballynahinch bypass proposal is included in Roads Service's strategic road improvement programme, and the strategic improvement of the Belfast to Newcastle trunk road is being progressed on the basis of the three-stage procedures outlined in the UK Highways Agency's 'Design Manual for Roads and Bridges'.

Roads Service has advised that the first stage was completed in 2009, with the publication of the preliminary options report for the bypass. The report records the results of an assessment of several potential corridors for the proposed bypass and identified a preferred corridor around the eastern outskirts of the town. That is consistent with the road line in the Ards and Down Area Plan 2015.

The traffic and economic assessments that have been undertaken show that the proposed scheme would be expected to provide value for money with transport benefits, including safety benefits, exceeding the costs involved in providing the improvement. Subsequently, work has been taken forward in the second stage to identify a preferred route for the scheme.

Three possible lines for a bypass within the preferred corridor on the eastern side of Ballynahinch have been considered. Those lines were the subject of a public information event and exhibition in the town in November 2009. That was well attended by members of the public, including landowners who are likely to be directly affected by the proposal and elected representatives. The consideration of comments received after the event, subsequent representations and the results of comprehensive engineering, environmental and economic assessments are now complete.

The timing of the debate is helpful since it allows me to announce that, yesterday, Roads Service approved the stage 2 preferred options report for the scheme, including the recommendation for a preferred line for the A24 Ballynahinch bypass scheme around the eastern outskirts and adjacent to the development limit of the town. That line will run from the junction of the A24 Belfast Road and the A21 Saintfield Road, which is north of the town, to the junction of the A24 Drumaness Road and the B2 Downpatrick Road, which is south of the town, at a distance of approximately 3·1 km.

The scheme will involve substantial earthworks to traverse the drumlin topography and ground conditions along the route, which includes the flood plain of the Ballynahinch river. Three substantial structures will be required where the route crosses Moss Road, Crossgar Road and the Ballynahinch river.

Consideration has also been given to requests to provide a junction where the proposed bypass crosses the B7 Crossgar Road. That work is recorded in the comprehensive stage 2 preferred options report. I am pleased to be able to confirm that Roads Service has also agreed that the scheme should include a junction with the B7 Crossgar Road. That will inevitably increase the cost of the scheme. Perhaps that deals with the concerns of some Members about the increasing costs of the scheme. However, it also provides additional transport benefits, including safety benefits, which outweigh the additional costs so that value for money is maintained. Traffic modelling indicates that, should the junction be provided, around 670 additional vehicles a day would be expected to use the bypass, and that would contribute to a further improvement in the traffic conditions in the town centre.

Strategic road improvement schemes of the nature and scale of the proposed A24 Ballynahinch bypass can be provided only at considerable cost, which, in this case, is estimated to be in the range of £40 million to £50 million.

Mr Wells: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Kennedy: If the Member is very quick, I will.

Mr Wells: I am absolutely shocked by that figure. As you know, 18 months ago, it was £28 million. The Crossgar junction, which is very good news, cannot possibly cost £10 million, so where does the extra cost come from?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his intervention. In his earlier contribution, I think that it was confirmed that, although he might make a very good Health Minister, he has limits as a potential Finance Minister. Mr Hamilton may well take on that burden. I stress that, at this point, the figures are estimates. It is difficult to give precise figures. I understand Mr Wells's concern and will seek to clarify the situation for him.

Although work to develop the scheme in preparation for progressing it through the statutory procedures continues, the timing of future road improvements will depend on the level of funding that materialises from the 2011-2021 investment strategy for Northern Ireland, the draft of which has been published and is out for consultation. Nevertheless, I appreciate the arguments that Members made today in favour of advancing the provision of the A24 Ballynahinch bypass and welcome the cross-community and cross-party agreement on that. I recognise the significant issues of road safety and offer my sincere sympathy to families who have endured the loss of loved relatives in traffic accidents.

I support the merits of the scheme and recognise the merits of other schemes, too. The Department is not opposed in any way to the A24 Ballynahinch bypass, as it is not opposed to improving the road network. When the level of funding is confirmed, I intend to consider my spending priorities across the Department, including the strategic roads programme, and to explore opportunities to bring forward schemes such as the A24 bypass. In the meantime, I assure Members that I have asked Roads Service officials to continue to progress that scheme, as resources allow, so that it may be ready to proceed to construction should finance become available.

I thank Members for their contributions to a helpful debate and look forward to working with Assembly colleagues on the matter in the coming days.

Adjourned at 5.38 pm.

Written Ministerial Statement

The content of this written ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

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Culture, Arts and Leisure

Salmon Conservation

Published at 12.00 noon
on Tuesday 17 January, 2012

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I am writing to update members on the state of wild Atlantic salmon stocks in the DCAL jurisdiction and of the need for stakeholders to take action to try to avert further decline in salmon numbers.

My Department commissions the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) to monitor the status of Atlantic salmon populations in the DCAL jurisdiction. Conservation Limits (CL) have been established for a suite of rivers that represent an index of the river types in the DCAL jurisdiction. These monitored rivers have failed to achieve CL in most years since 2002.

Although the definitive status of all river populations in the DCAL jurisdiction is not known, under the precautionary approach adopted by the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation, we should assume that all populations are suffering reduced reproductive capacity, since marine survival is so low and due to the similarity of unmonitored river types to monitored index rivers.

Loughs Agency monitoring has indicated that some Foyle catchment stocks are now also below management targets.

AFBI has determined that DCAL licensed drift nets and bag nets fishing for salmon off the Co. Antrim Coast are intercepting mixed stocks of salmon from rivers monitored by DCAL and also salmon from the Foyle catchment. Although draft nets fishing for salmon off the Co. Down coast have not been sampled to definitively determine composition of their catch in terms of rivers of origin, these fishing engines operate adjacent to an index river that is failing to meet its CL. Again under the precautionary approach we should also assume that these nets are intercepting salmon from other non-index rivers in the area.

Long term monitoring of the survival of salmon during the marine phase of their lifecycle at Bushmills Salmon Station shows a decline from around 30% prior to 1997 to less than 5% today.

At the 'Salmon Summit' in La Rochelle, France, in October 2011 international scientists confirmed that wild Atlantic salmon are dying at sea in alarming numbers. Southern stocks including some in North America and Europe are threatened with extinction. The reasons for increased marine mortality are not clear but international research into various factors contributing to this is on-going.

After careful consideration of all the available scientific research and data I have concluded that the continued commercial exploitation of wild Atlantic salmon and killing of salmon caught by rod and line in the DCAL jurisdiction is currently untenable. Authorising such exploitation would be inconsistent with the Departments obligations under the EC Habitats Directive and with NASCO guidelines. This could lead to significant infraction fines being imposed by the EC.

Consequently I am calling on stakeholders to support a range of voluntary conservation measures for 2012 to allow my Department to consult on how we can contribute to the long term sustainability of wild Atlantic salmon stocks. Current legislation does not readily enable the introduction of further restrictions on the taking of salmon in time for the opening of the 2012 fishing season, hence the call for voluntary action by stakeholders.

Departmental officials have written to the Salmon and Inland Fisheries Forum, on which the range of stakeholders is represented, to ask for support for a range of voluntary conservation measures to minimise exploitation of salmon stocks in 2012. Officials have written separately to all DCAL licensed commercial fishermen operating coastal and Lough Neagh fishing engines and have asked for a voluntary cessation of salmon fishing in the DCAL jurisdiction in 2012. Through the Forum the Department has asked for support for those measures and for voluntary catch and release for all recreational anglers in 2012. The implementation of such proposals within the DCAL jurisdiction would be consistent with steps taken by other jurisdictions on the island of Ireland and elsewhere.

It is hoped that stakeholders can find common ground in the interests of recovery of stocks and with the shared aim of a return to sustainability of all salmon fisheries, there will be a good level of support for the proposals. My Department will work with stakeholders to address any concerns and clarifications that they may raise.

With the co-operation of stakeholders the exploitation of wild Atlantic salmon can be minimised in 2012. This offers the Department time to consult on a range of options on the future of both commercial salmon fishing and recreational angling for salmon.

Written Answers

This section contains the written answers to questions tabled by Members. The content of the responses is as received at the time from the relevant Minister or representative of the Assembly Commission, and it has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process or changed.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 16 December 2011

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

OFMDFM: Spend

Dr McDonnell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail their Department's (i) direct; and (ii) indirect spend in each of the last ten years in the Belfast City Council area.
(AQW 3528/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): OFMDFM do not hold their financial data by council areas and therefore it is not possible to provide an answer to this question.

Social Investment Fund

Mr Dickson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when a decision will be made on the bids received under the Social Investment Fund.
(AQW 3689/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The proposals for the Social Investment Fund are currently out for consultation. There are no bids being considered at this time. Officials are working with other departments to finalise proposals for consideration under the Social Protection Fund.

Police Ombudsman

Mrs D Kelly asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the timescale for the recruitment to the post of Police Ombudsman.
(AQW 3993/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are currently considering appropriate arrangements for the identification of a person to recommend for appointment as Police Ombudsman, in line with our responsibilities under Paragraph 1 of Schedule 3 to the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998, as amended in 2010.

Victims' Groups: Funding

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the level of funding allocated to each victims' group in each of the last five years.
(AQW 3996/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We would refer the Member to the reply we gave to AQW 1170/11-15 on 18 July 2011.

In addition, figures for 2010/11 are now available and are set out below:

Victims Capital Scheme Grant Awards 2010-2011

Ref	Group	Summary	Amount Paid (£)
Armagh City & District Council			
090989	County Armagh Phoenix Group	Financial support towards capital expenditure items and refurbishment costs for groups working with victims and survivors of the Northern Ireland conflicts.	2,021.80
		Total for Armagh	**2,021.80**

Ref	Group	Summary	Amount Paid (£)
Fermanagh District Council			
090958	Ulster Defence Regimental Association Enniskillen Branch	Financial support towards capital expenditure items and refurbishment costs for groups working with victims and survivors of the Northern Ireland conflicts.	257.55
091024	South East Fermanagh Foundation	Financial support towards capital expenditure items and refurbishment costs for groups working with victims and survivors of the Northern Ireland conflicts.	2,267.11
		Total for Fermanagh	**2,524.66**
Overall Total			**4,546.46**

Victims/Survivors Strategic Support Fund Grant Awards 2010-2011

Ref	Group	Summary	Amount Paid (£)
Belfast City Council			
100408	New Life Counselling Service	Strategic Support Fund: salaries, running costs and associated service delivery costs for Victims and Survivors Groups.	85,052.63
100425	Corpus Christi Services	Strategic Support Fund: salaries, running costs and associated service delivery costs for Victims and Survivors Groups.	59,782.14
100426	Victims and Survivors Trust (VAST)	Strategic Support Fund: salaries, running costs and associated service delivery costs for Victims and Survivors Groups.	61,261.68
100427	Holy Trinity Centre	Strategic Support Fund: salaries, running costs and associated service delivery costs for Victims and Survivors Groups.	18,524.53
100435	Ashton Community Trust	Strategic Support Fund: salaries, running costs and associated service delivery costs for Victims and Survivors Groups.	235,809.00
100457	Lenadoon Community Counselling Network	Strategic Support Fund: salaries, running costs and associated service delivery costs for Victims and Survivors Groups.	49,490.44
		Total for Belfast	**509,920.42**
Derry City Council			
100401	Aurora Counselling Services	Strategic Support Fund: salaries, running costs and associated service delivery costs for Victims and Survivors Groups.	34,234.63
100434	Pat Finucane Centre	Strategic Support Fund: salaries, running costs and associated service delivery costs for Victims and Survivors Groups.	6,399.00
100456	Cunamh	Strategic Support Fund: salaries, running costs and associated service delivery costs for Victims and Survivors Groups.	51,063.45
		Total for Derry	**91,697.08**

Ref	Group	Summary	Amount Paid (£)
Fermanagh District Council			
100437	Firinne	Strategic Support Fund: salaries, running costs and associated service delivery costs for Victims and Survivors Groups.	73,049.34
		Total for Fermanagh	**73,049.34**
Lisburn City Council			
100458	Colin Community Counselling Project	Strategic Support Fund: salaries, running costs and associated service delivery costs for Victims and Survivors Groups.	31,147.18
		Total for Lisburn	**31,147.18**
Multiple Councils			
100436	Relatives for Justice	Strategic Support Fund: salaries, running costs and associated service delivery costs for Victims and Survivors Groups.	308,951.62
100459	WAVE	Strategic Support Fund: salaries, running costs and associated service delivery costs for Victims and Survivors Groups.	588,590.50
100464	Northern Ireland Centre for Trauma & Transformation	Strategic Support Fund: salaries, running costs and associated service delivery costs for Victims and Survivors Groups.	196,417.00
		Total for Multiple	**1,093,959.12**
Omagh District Council			
100393	Tara Counselling & Personal Development Company Ltd.	Strategic Support Fund: salaries, running costs and associated service delivery costs for Victims and Survivors Groups.	93,057.39
		Total for Omagh	**93,057.39**
Strabane District Council			
100428	The Koram Centre	Strategic Support Fund: salaries, running costs and associated service delivery costs for Victims and Survivors Groups.	125,071.61
		Total for Strabane	**125,071.61**
Overall Total			**2,017,902.14**

Victims and Survivors Core Funding Grant Awards 2010-2011

Ref	Group	Summary	Amount Paid (£)
Armagh City & District Council			
100111	Families Acting for Innocent Relatives	Running Costs and Salaries for Victims and Survivors Groups.	67,862.63
100131	SAVER/NAVER	Running costs and salaries for Victims and Survivors Groups	34,386.02
100144	WAVE Trauma Centre Armagh	Running costs and salaries for victims and survivors groups	26,561.80
		Total for Armagh	**128,810.45**

Ref	Group	Summary	Amount Paid (£)
Ballymoney Borough Council			
100145	WAVE Trauma Centre Ballymoney	Running costs and salaries for victims and survivors groups	19,677.86
		Total for Ballymoney	**19,677.86**
Banbridge District Council			
100126	NOVA	Salaries and Running Costs for Victims and Survivors Groups	124,987.49
		Total for Banbridge	**124,987.49**
Belfast City Council			
100101	Ashton Community Trust	Running costs and salaries for victims and survivors groups	29,690.18
100102	Centre for Health and Well Being	Running costs and salaries for victims and survivors groups	40,013.77
100105	Contact Youth Counselling Services (NI)	Running Costs and Salaries for Victims and Survivors Groups.	45,834.52
100106	Corpus Christi Services	Salaries and Running Costs for Victims and Survivors Groups.	28,818.00
100112	FODDD	Salaries and Running Costs for Victims and Survivors Groups	35,204.10
100114	Haven Victim Support Group	Running Costs and Salaries for Victims and Survivors Groups.	46,428.56
100118	Lenadoon Community Counselling Network	Running costs and salaries for victims and survivors groups	21,600.38
100119	Lifeline	Running Costs for Victims and Survivors Groups.	2,520.83
100123	New Life Counselling Service	Running costs and salaries for victims and survivors groups	13,596.61
100124	Nexus Institute	Salaries and Running Costs for Victims and Survivors Groups.	8,026.50
100129	Relatives for Justice	Salaries and running costs for Victims and Survivors Groups	55,624.38
100135	Springhill Community Group	Running Costs and Salaries for Victims and Survivors Groups	48,444.24
100136	Streetbeat Youth Project	Running Costs and Salaries for Victims and Survivors Groups	42,746.18
100137	Survivors of Trauma	Running Costs and Salaries for Victims and Survivors Groups	66,326.17
100141	Wider Circle	Salaries and Running Costs for Victims and Survivors Groups	55,575.03
100143	Victims and Survivors Trust (VAST)	Running Costs and Salaries for Victims and Survivors Groups.	26,566.11
100146	WAVE	Running costs and salaries for victims and survivors groups.	53,876.18
		Total for Belfast	**620,891.74**

Ref	Group	Summary	Amount Paid (£)
Coleraine Borough Council			
100128	Regimental Association of UDR	Running costs and salaries for Victims and Survivors Groups	34,747.00
		Total for Coleraine	**34,747.00**
Craigavon Borough Council			
100115	H.U.R.T. Group	Salaries and Running Costs for Victims and Survivors Groups.	71,058.41
		Total for Craigavon	**71,058.41**
Derry City Council			
100103	C.A.L.M.S	Salaries and Running Costs for Victims and Survivors Groups	74,943.74
100104	Columba Celtic Heritage Support Services	Salaries and Running Costs for Victims and Survivors Groups	51,289.85
100107	Cunamh	Salaries and Running Costs for Victims and Survivors Groups	33,978.89
100108	Derry Well Woman	Salaries and Running Costs for Victims and Survivors Groups	44,479.52
100120	Lifeways Psychotherapy & Counselling Centre	Running costs and salaries for victims and survivors groups	43,132.72
100142	United Services Club Victims & Survivors	Running Costs and Salaries for Victims and Survivors Groups.	29,126.91
100147	WAVE	Running costs and salaries for victims and survivors groups	35,117.82
		Total for Derry	**312,069.45**
Fermanagh District Council			
100100	Aisling Centre	Salaries and Running Costs for Victims and Survivors Groups.	42,839.32
100113	Firinne	Running Costs and Salaries for Victims and Survivors Groups.	31,038.09
100132	South Down Action for Healing Wounds	Running costs and salaries for Victims and Survivors Groups	60,805.28
100133	South East Fermanagh Foundation	Running costs and salaries for Victims and Survivors Groups	82,316.64
100140	The Ely Centre	Salaries and Running Costs for Victims and Survivors Groups.	69,511.39
		Total for Fermanagh	**286,510.72**
Lisburn City Council			
100116	ICPD	Running costs and salaries for victims and survivors groups	40,019.66
		Total for Lisburn	**40,019.66**

Ref	Group	Summary	Amount Paid (£)
Multiple Councils			
100109	Ex Services Mental Welfare Society	Running Costs and Salaries for Victims and Survivors Groups	62,956.48
100125	NI Music Therapy Trust	Running Costs and Salaries for Victims and Survivors Groups.	48,104.00
		Total for Multiple	**111,060.48**
Newry & Mourne District Council			
100122	Mourne Action for Survivors of Terrorism	Running Costs and Salaries for Victims and Survivors Groups	28,543.73
		Total for Newry and Mourne	**28,543.73**
Omagh District Council			
100127	Omagh Support & Self Help Group	Running costs and salaries for victims and survivors groups	78,107.86
100138	TARA Counselling & Personal Dev Centre	Running costs and salaries for victims and survivors groups	30,708.66
100148	WAVE Trauma Centre Omagh	Running costs and salaries for Victims and Survivors Groups	23,946.54
100149	West Tyrone Voice	Running costs and salaries for Victims and Survivors Groups	68,735.47
		Total for Omagh	**201,498.53**
Strabane District Council			
100117	The Koram Centre	Running costs and salaries for victims and survivors groups	30,440.60
		Total for Strabane	**30,440.60**
Overall Total			**2,010,316.12**

Victims/Survivors Development Grant Awards 2010-2011

Ref	Group	Summary	Amount Paid (£)
All Councils			
100183	Wounded Police and Families Association	Annual Programme of events and activities specifically designed to support the Wounded Police and their families as a result of the conflict.	17,275.75
100255	Fire Service Past Members Association	Members meetings and respite support programme	8,958.00
100446	Justice for Innocent Victims of Terrorism	To provide advocacy support services to the membership of JIVT.	10,649.46
		Total for All Councils	**36,883.21**

Ref	Group	Summary	Amount Paid (£)
Antrim Borough Council			
100611	Antrim Youth Information and Counselling centre	Financial support towards volunteer expenses.	864.00
		Total for Antrim	**864.00**
Ards Borough Council			
100339	Comber Veterans (Op banner)	Respite support activity.	1,020.79
100515	Royal Irish Rangers	Social inclusion support activity.	942.00
100547	NI Phoenix Project	Support towards Organisational Development Meetings of NI Phoenix Steering Committee.	1,414.00
100569	USC Association-Newtownards Branch	Respite support and befriending programme.	1,144.00
100606	Newtownards and District Phoenix Group	Befriending training support and supervision.	2,439.10
		Total for Ards	**6,959.89**
Armagh City and District Council			
100164	The Royal British Legion	Respite support activity.	935.00
100178	County Armagh Phoenix Group	Group visit to Wicklow to visit The Glencree Peace Centre followed by attendance and participation in the ANZAC Memorial Service in Dublin	3,820.00
100204	WAVE Trauma Centre Armagh	Continuation of existing counselling provision and complementary therapies to maintain ongoing support to those individuals who have been affected by the N I Conflict.	5,775.85
100216	County Armagh Phoenix Group	Respite and social support programme.	7,567.02
100288	FAIR	Support towards continuation of ongoing services to Victims/Survivors.	13,421.75
100289	Saver Naver	Support towards continuation of ongoing services to Victims/Survivors.	10,433.00
100305	County Armagh Phoenix Group	A support scheme for volunteers and coordinators undertaking befriending work with County Armagh Phoenix Group	4,638.55
100507	Armagh Association Voluntary Welfare Group	Newsletter	2,240.33
100605	County Armagh Phoenix Group	Befriending Support Programme	2,212.20
100632	South Down Action for Healing Wounds	Befriending	20,400.50
		Total for Armagh	**71,444.20**

Ref	Group	Summary	Amount Paid (£)
Ballymena Borough Council			
100239	RUC GC Association (Ballymena Branch)	Members' meetings and respite support activity.	3,150.00
		Total for Ballymena	**3,150.00**
Ballymoney Borough Council			
100201	The Regimental Association	Respite support activity.	5,789.00
100205	WAVE Trauma Centre Ballymoney	Continuation of existing counselling provision and complementary therapies to maintain ongoing support to those individuals who have been affected by the N I Conflict.	8,145.00
		Total for Ballymoney	**13,934.00**
Banbridge District Council			
100196	UDR Association County Down	Remembrance activities.	1,120.00
100237	South Down Action for Healing Wounds	Respite support programme	17,420.00
100253	South Down Action for Healing Wounds	Transgenerational Support Programme.	8,811.00
100270	South Down Action for Healing Wounds	Befriending programme support.	1,653.25
100279	South Down Action for Healing Wounds	The continued training and coordination of Befrienders together with the running of the service	5,212.00
100322	South Down Action for Healing Wounds	Complementary therapies to assist Victims and Survivors with the healing process	4,500.00
100327	Phoenix Group Banbridge	Social Inclusion and Respite Support	8,325.98
100334	Together Encouraging and Remembering (TEAR)	Social inclusion and respite support.	2,207.85
		Total for Banbridge	**49,250.08**
Belfast City Council			
090334	The Cross Group	Voluntary support with respite activity.	1,097.40
100180	New Life Counselling Service	Training for counsellors and sessional counselling support for victims and survivors of the troubles.	4,137.85
100184	Forum For Action On Substance	Transgenerational Support Programme	45,286.52
100186	WAVE	Continuation of psychotherapy intervention services and complementary therapies for individuals who have been affected by the Northern Ireland conflict.	12,650.00
100198	Springhill Community House	To provide series of 5 home-based sessions of complementary therapy to most affected victims to increase confidence and participation	10,000.00
100234	Centre for Health and Well Being	Annual programme of activities and services designed to support victims/survivors.	5,160.73
100268	Centre for Health and Well Being	Support towards continuation of ongoing services to Victims/Survivors.	5,625.63

Ref	Group	Summary	Amount Paid (£)
100272	Victims and Survivors Trust (VAST)	Support towards continuation of ongoing services to Victims/Survivors.	610.13
100274	New Life Counselling Service Ardoyne	Support towards continuation of ongoing services to Victims/Survivors.	9,121.75
100278	Corpus Christi Services	Support towards continuation of ongoing services to Victims/Survivors.	865.00
100286	Families Beyond Conflict	A Befriending Support Programme to support victims and survivors.	7,740.60
100299	HELP NI	Transgenerational one-to-one mentoring support programme.	35,344.06
100306	Victims and Survivors Trust (VAST)	Befriending Programme support.	6,762.86
100324	Corpus Christi Services	Counselling support.	215.00
100326	RUC GC Foundation	Respite support.	1,380.66
100330	HAVEN	Personal development and respite programme.	4,811.00
100387	HAVEN	Workplan of services and activities to support victims/ survivors.	11,229.50
100389	Springhill Community House	Workplan of activities and services designed to support victims/survivors.	34,830.00
100404	Hurt Group	Workplan of services and activities to support victims/ survivors.	20,615.00
100448	WAVE	Storytelling Project.	4,000.00
100505	HELP NI	Organisational Development - Management Committee Training.	2,538.75
100535	HELP NI	Volunteer support.	4,000.00
100591	WAVE	Respite and social inclusion activity.	3,221.00
100592	WAVE	Storytelling - Second print of the 'Injured' -series of Individual Victims' Stories.	6,250.00
100593	WAVE	Planning/Storytelling residential.	4,030.60
100594	WAVE	Recording of transgenerational activity.	4,000.00
100595		Remembrance activity.	1,174.96
100601	Centre for Health and Well Being	Mental Health and Wellbeing through complementary therapy support.	7,990.00
100622	Forum For Action On Substance	Mental Health and Wellbeing through Holistic Therapies	10,000.00
100623	HELP NI	Respite support activity.	3,400.00
100624	HELP NI	Volunteer Support	2,274.00
100626	Niamh (Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health	Bursary awards.	7,500.00
100645	Springhill Community House	Training programme for victims/survivors.	4,504.00

Ref	Group	Summary	Amount Paid (£)
		Total for Belfast	**282,367.00**
Coleraine Borough Council			
100332	Regimental Association of UDR	Historical and educational respite support.	1,563.50
		Total for Coleraine	**1,563.50**
Cookstown Borough Council			
100160	Comrades Support Group	Social inclusion and respite support programme.	12,414.00
100173	Stewartstown and District Support Group	Series of respite and educational programmes designed to meet the needs of victims and survivors of the conflict.	16,309.18
100236	Colleague Support Group	Support towards meetings management mileage and respite activities	8,648.00
100340	Cookstown Voluntary Welfare Support Group	Respite support activity.	1,825.00
		Total for Cookstown	**39,196.18**
Craigavon Borough Council			
100176	Portadown Voluntary Welfare Group	Respite trip to Harrogate and Yorkshire Dales for members of Portadown Voluntary Welfare Group	4,300.00
		Total for Craigavon	**4,300.00**

Ref	Group	Summary	Amount Paid (£)
Derry City Council			
100188	Eglinton Building Bridges	Personal Development and Befriending Programme	48,628.00
100202	WAVE Trauma Centre Derry	Continuation of existing counselling provision and complementary therapies to maintain ongoing support to those individuals who have been affected by the Northern Ireland Conflict.	4,305.00
100245	UDR Association-Londonderry Branch	Social Inclusion and Respite Support Activities	4,711.30
100267	C.A.L.M.S	Support towards continuation of ongoing services to Victims/Survivors.	8,193.75
100269	Derry Well Woman	Support towards continuation of ongoing services to Victims/Survivors.	5,805.00
100396	Columba Community	Projects to help people make the transition from victim to survivor.	4,126.14
100400	Calms	Annual Programme of activities and services designed to support Victims/Survivors	36,087.93
100406	Derry Well Woman	Annual Programme of activities and services designed to support Victims/Survivors	21,274.59
100423	Teach na Failte	Mental Health and Wellbeing through Counselling Support	12,600.00
100438	C.A.L.M.S	Annual Programme of activities and services designed to support Victims/Survivors	43,002.25

Ref	Group	Summary	Amount Paid (£)
100602	Ulster Special Constabulary Ass. Londonderry Branch	Befriending and Respite Support Activities	2,289.27
100610	Teach na Failte	Mental Health and Wellbeing through Counselling Support	5,460.00
		Total for Derry	**196,483.23**

Ref	Group	Summary	Amount Paid (£)
Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council			
090680	Dungannon Branch USCA "Welfare Fund"	Social Inclusion and Respite Support	201.57
100174	Aughnacloy Comrades Support Group	Respite and Social Outreach Programme	12,293.14
100200	Royal Ulster Constabulary GC Association- East Tyrone Branch	Meetings for Members	360.00
100214	Clogher Ladies Friendship Group	Organisational Development Training	342.80
100284	South Tyrone Voluntary Welfare Group	Respite Support	1,000.00
100285	Comrades Support Group - Dungannon Branch	Respite and Social Inclusion Support Programme	7,000.00
100325	Victims Support Welfare Group	Respite and Social Inclusion Support Programme	7,384.80
100545	Dungannon Branch USCA "Welfare Fund"	Respite and Befriending Support	607.84
100550	South Tyrone Voluntary Welfare Group	Respite Activity	3,720.00
100551	Victims Support Welfare Group	Respite Activity	4,546.66
100552	Regimental Association of the Ulster Defence Regiment-Old Comrades- Clogher Branch	Social Inclusion Activities	3,065.70
100559	USC Assoc - Clogher Branch	Social Inclusion and Befriending Activities	1,841.31
100603	Tyrone East Phoenix Group	Befriending Programme Support	6,329.50
100613	South Tyrone Voluntary Welfare Group	Social Inclusion Activity	755.00

Ref	Group	Summary	Amount Paid (£)
100614	Victims Support Welfare Group	Respite Support Activity	3,068.21
		Total for Dungannon and South Tyrone	**52,516.53**
Fermanagh District Council			
090595	Justice for Innocent Victims of Terrorism	Research Project on the impact of the HET and to establish if there is a need for further advocacy support to Members	1,850.01
100162	Fermanagh Voluntary Welfare Support Group	Social Inclusion and Respite Programme of Activities	27,937.50
100170	Royal Irish Rangers Association Enniskillen Branch	Remembrance Activities Social Inclusion and Respite Support Activities	23,702.00
100187	South East Fermanagh Foundation	Annual Programme of activities and services designed specifically to support Victims/Survivors	116,416.94
100192	Ulster Defence Regimental Association Enniskillen Branch	Social Inclusion Befriending Programme and Respite Support Activities	17,434.09
100210	Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers Regimental Assoc (Enniskillen Branch)	Social Inclusion Activities	7,682.00
100213	5th Royal Inniskilling Dragoons (Fermanagh Branch)	Social Inclusion Activities	7,028.00
100215	Ladies Friendship Group	Befriending Programme Support	456.57
100226	The Ely Centre	Personal Development Programme	2,800.00
100228	UDR Association - Lisnaskea Branch	Social Inclusion Befriending and Respite Support Programme	18,058.40
100243	Ulster Defence Regimental Association Enniskillen Branch	Personal Development Programme	3,340.00
100244	Firinne	Alternative Therapies and Respite Programme	7,526.99
100250	Ladies Friendship Group	Respite Support Programme	3,961.00
100273	The Ely Centre	Support towards continuation of ongoing services to Victims/Survivors.	15,538.12
100291	Firinne	Support towards continuation of ongoing services to Victims/Survivors.	750.00
100295	South East Fermanagh Foundation	Support towards continuation of ongoing services to Victims/Survivors.	17,299.00
100392	The Ely Centre	Workplan of services and activities to support victims/ survivors.	28,438.77
100541	The Ely Centre	Continuation of ongoing Carers Programme	5,824.00

Ref	Group	Summary	Amount Paid (£)
100561	USC Association-Lisnaskea Branch	Respite and Befriending Programme	3,966.00
100596	Fermanagh Voluntary Welfare Support Group	Social Inclusion Activity	430.00
		Total for Fermanagh	**310,439.39**
Larne Borough Council			
100431	Association of the Royal Irish Regiment Fermanagh/South Tyrone Branch	Members Meetings and Respite Support Activity	4,615.70
100573	Garryowen Masonic Lodge No 923	Social Inclusion Activity	1,200.00
		Total for Larne	**5,815.70**
Multiple Councils			
100165	Disabled Police Officers Association NI	Residential for 80 members and their carers to include workshops addressing the roles of individuals and communities during the troubles identifying members' needs and establishing a basis for further workshops and activities. Art therapy sessions for 16 members and two social functions for members and their families to enhance supportive relationships between members and their families in a safe environment.	7,844.00
100175	Tyrone East Phoenix Group	A programme of befriending service including bringing befriendees together for coffee mornings	21,228.64
100182	Relatives for Justice	Annual Project Costs for Relatives for Justice offices in Belfast, Tyrone, Armagh and Down offices.	20,707.85
100191	Tyrone West Phoenix Group	Organisational Meetings and Respite Programme	32,137.95
100195	Wives Club UDR	Social Inclusion and Respite Programme	11,894.23
100206	Royal Ulster Constabulary GC Association	Social Inclusion and Respite Programme	22,031.45
100249	Lansew Association	Respite Support Programme	15,248.88
100292	Relatives for Justice	Support toward continuation of ongoing services to Victims/Survivors.	3,630.00
100293	Ashton Community Trust	Support towards continuation of ongoing services to Victims/Survivors.	18,228.00
100331	North West Prison Officers	Respite Activities and Storytelling Project for Members.	3,256.00
100429	WAVE	Residential for families of people who have disappeared during the troubles.	1,600.00
100443	Wider Circle	Organisational Development to develop the centre's priorities and needs	3,970.80
100509	Ashton Community Trust	Financial support towards working with victims and survivors of the Northern Ireland conflict.	34,025.13
100514	Tinderbox Theatre Company	Delivering drama performances that will reach out to those who have been affected by the Northern Ireland conflict	3,650.00

Ref	Group	Summary	Amount Paid (£)
100557	RUC George Cross Association	Remembrance Activities	831.00
100572	Wider Circle	Provide facilitator training and deliver two twelve week self help trauma programmes using volunteer facilitators.	2,402.01
		Total for Multiple	**202,685.94**
Newry and Mourne District Council			
100190	Mourne Action for Survivors of Terrorism	Annual Programme of activities and services specially designed to support Victims/Survivors	41,029.26
100193	Fews Community Association for Victims/survivors	Respite and Befriending Programme	4,901.00
100238	Newry and Mourne Voluntary Welfare Group	Befriending Programme Support	2,583.20
100290	Mourne Action for Survivors of Terrorism	Support towards continuation of ongoing services to Victims/Survivors.	4,316.29
100318	Mourne Action for Survivors of Terrorism	Remembrance Activity	7,602.40
100512	Newry and Mourne Voluntary Welfare Group	Respite Activity	5,925.50
100598	Newry and Mourne Voluntary Welfare Group	Respite and Befriending Programme	7,639.20
Total for Newry and Mourne			**73,996.85**
Newtownabbey Borough Council			
100439	The Breakaway Blues	A residential and partnership with victim groups in Derry/ Londonderry and cross community coffee mornings.	2,684.20
		Total for Newtownabbey	**2,684.20**
Omagh District Council			
100179	Omagh Police Wives	Series of activities to assist ex-police wives in their recovery process	2,615.69
100203	WAVE Trauma Centre Omagh	Continuation of existing counselling provision and complementary therapies to maintain ongoing support to those individuals who have been affected by the N I Conflict.	12,135.00
100217	The Strule Association	A Series of Respite Support Activities and Befriending Training	14,090.60
100235	Omagh Support and Self Help Group	Annual Programme of activities and services specifically designed to support Victims/Survivors	23,633.18
100251	Omagh Support and Self Help Group	Annual Programme of activities and services specifically designed to support Victims/Survivors	10,329.51
100275	TARA Counselling and Personal Dev Centre	Support towards continuation of ongoing services to Victims/Survivors.	2,500.00

Ref	Group	Summary	Amount Paid (£)
100294	Omagh Support and Self Help Group	Support towards continuation of ongoing services to Victims/Survivors.	4,556.03
100319	Families Moving On	Annual Programme of activities and services specifically designed to support Victims/Survivors	37,182.50
100323	TARA Counselling and Personal Dev Centre	The provision of psychotherapy and counselling sessions to Victims/Survivors	2,500.00
100424	The Regimental Association of the Ulster Defence Regiment Old Comrades- Omagh Branch	Remembrance Social Inclusion and Respite Support	13,748.89
100544	Omagh Police Voluntary Welfare Group	Respite Support Activity	3,441.25
100546	Families Moving On	To provide administrative support for the newly formed group Families Moving On	1,944.00
100563	Ulster Special Constabulary - Omagh	Respite and Befriending Support	2,318.77
100604	Tyrone West Phoenix Group	Befriending Programme Support	4,318.75
100625	Omagh Support and Self Help Group	Provision of information packs and brochures detailing work and services available to victims and survivors of the conflict.	2,647.21
		Total for Omagh	**137,961.38**
Strabane District Council			
100302	Regimental Association of the Ulster Defence Regiment Castlederg Branch	Respite Support Programme	16,338.27
100314	Have Your Tomorrows (Hurt)	Provide services for addiction problems stemming mainly from experiences during the troubles	9,600.00
100402	West Tyrone Voice	Workplan of services and activities to support Victims/ Survivors.	27,047.49
100589	West Tyrone Voice	Respite Support	180.00
		Total for Strabane	**53,165.76**
Overall Total			**1,545,661.04**

Legislative Programme

Mrs D Kelly asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 3490/11-15, to detail the timetable for assessing legislative requirements and publishing the legislative programme.
(AQW 4123/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Following the publication of the draft Programme for Government, we are currently consulting with all Ministers of the Executive about their legislative proposals which should reflect the priorities and commitments set out in the Programme. Once these have been received and considered we will prepare and, at an appropriate time, seek the Executive's agreement to a Legislative Programme.

One Plan

Mr Eastwood asked First Minister and deputy First Minister, with regard to the Ilex Urban Regeneration Company's One Plan for Derry regeneration programme, to detail (i) the funds from their current budget that have been committed to projects under this programme; (ii) the projects that are being funded; and (iii) the start dates for these projects.
(AQW 4245/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Ilex Regeneration Company is jointly sponsored by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and the Department for Social Development (DSD). Both departments have tasked Ilex with the production and delivery of the regeneration plan for Derry-Londonderry, and especially the development of the former military sites at Ebrington Barracks, owned by OFMDFM, and Fort George owned by DSD.

The One Plan was published in June 2011 and Ilex is currently engaging with other departments to ensure that it is used to inform future decision making in the North West.

Funding for capital expenditure allocations in the 2010 Budget on the development of the Ebrington site are detailed below:

	2011-12 £000's	**2012-13 £000's**	**2013-14 £000's**	**2014-15 £000's**	**Total £000's**
Capital	6,015	7,800	4,800	4,400	23,015
Revenue	1,911	1,891	1,870	1,849	7,521
Total	**7,926**	**9,691**	**6,670**	**6,249**	**30,536**

The Department provides provision for revenue costs to Ilex i.e. 50% of the annual running costs of Ilex and other expenditure largely in relation to projects at Ebrington.

It is envisaged that the following projects will be developed on the Ebrington site:

- the development of the parade ground infrastructure and public realm;
- the car park and enabling platform;
- the refurbishment of a building to house the Maritime Museum; and
- the development of the Clocktower building in the main square.

In addition, ongoing conservation works to bring other buildings back into use on the site will continue.

The parade ground works commenced in September 2010 with a completion date of early 2012. The car park project is due to commence in 2012. The Clocktower is due to commence in 2012/13 and the Maritime Museum is due to commence in 2014/15.

OFMDFM: Public Contracts

Mr McCartney asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to list all the current public contracts within their Department, including to whom each contract was awarded; how the contracts were advertised; and when each contract is next due for tender.
(AQW 4305/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Details of all current public contracts within our Department are given in the table below.

No.	**Contract title**	**Contract awarded to:**	**How contract was advertised***	**Date contract next due for tender**
1	OFMDFM-Development of Framework Guidance: Sustainable Development Statutory Duty	Jim Kitchen Consulting	By Invitation Only	December 2011 (current contract ends 2 December 2011)
2	OFMDFM - Provision of Consultant for work on Disability Issues	Disability Action	By Invitation Only	January 2012 (current contract ends 6 January 2012)
3	EIS production of AV material	Morrow Communications	ITT Open to All Suppliers Non-EU-Procurement	March 2012
4	nidirect advertising campaign	Navigator Blue	Invitation only (using Advertising Framework)	March 2012
5	Office of the NI Executive in Brussels (ONIEB) - Cleaning contract	APS	Procured with 3 quotations	October 2012

No.	Contract title	Contract awarded to:	How contract was advertised*	Date contract next due for tender
6	NI Bureau, Washington -Venue for St Patrick's day business breakfast	Ronald Reagan International Trade Centre	Open tender in Washington DC	November 2012 – annual open tender
7	ONIEB - Photocopier maintenance contract	Orgaburo	Procured with 3 quotations	December 2012
8	Mac Maintenance Contract	EOS Systems	3 quotes	April 2013
9	OFMDFM Classified Placement Service	ASG	ITT Open to All Suppliers Eu-Open	June 2013
10	The Supply of Security Passes to the Northern Ireland Government Departments	Emos-Infineer Ltd	ITT Open to All Suppliers Other	July 2013
11	Business Planning System	Parity	Procured after 3 quotations	Contract ends July 2013. Decision on re-tendering will be made nearer the date.
12	TGI Software database	BMRB (now known as Kantar Media)	Single tender action	August 2013
13	'Maintenance of the Children's Research Database'	ARK	CPD	September 2013
14	OFMDFM - Event Management Services	Morrow Communications	ITT Open to All Suppliers Other	October 2013
15	Northern Ireland Civil Service Recruitment Advertising Placement Provider	ASG	ITT Open to All Suppliers Eu-Open	January 2014
16	OFMDFM Graphic Design Services	Page Setup	ITT Open to All Suppliers Eu-Open	March 2014
17	ONIEB - Handset phone rental	Nextel – ING lease	Procured with 3 quotations	November 2014
18	ONIEB - Water filters	Culligan	Procured with 3 quotations	February 2015
19	Media Monitoring and Evaluation	Kantar Media	Central Procurement Directorate (CPD), Dept of Finance and Personnel	November 2015
20	ONIEB - Security call out	Securitas	Procured with 3 quotations	Renewable every year
21	ONIEB - Security patrol	Russo Security	Procured with 3 quotations	Renewable every year
22	Phase 2 remediation works Maze/Long Kesh Regeneration Site	Bilfinger Berger Environmental Ltd	ITT Open to All Suppliers Non-EU-Procurement	One off contract – not being re-tendered
23	Maze/Long Kesh Habitat Survey	Scott Wilson	By Invitation Only Appointment from Framework	One off contract – not being re-tendered
24	Maze/Long Kesh Contamination Assessment Work	White Young Green	CPD	One off contract – not being re-tendered
25	'Spatial deprivation research'	QUB	CPD	One off contract – will not be retendered

No.	Contract title	Contract awarded to:	How contract was advertised*	Date contract next due for tender
26	NI Bureau, Washington Engaging porters for office move	Washington Removals	Open tender in Washington DC	One off contract re office move

***Note:** All contracts awarded through Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) in the Department of Finance and Personnel since May 2008 have been advertised through the eSourcingNI portal. Those contracts identified on the table as "Invitation to Tender (ITT) Open to All Suppliers" were publicly advertised to all potential suppliers. Those contracts listed as "By Invitation Only" were advertised to a restricted number of suppliers. Where other methods have been used these have been specified on the table.

Public Appointments

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to list the public appointments both they and their predecessors have made since May 2007.
(AQW 4910/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A list of public appointments made by us or our predecessors since 8 May 2007 is set out below.

Body/Office	Appointees	Date Appointed	Date Left
Commissioner for Children & Young People	Ms P Lewsley	08/01/2011 (R)	
Commission for Victims & Survivors	Ms P MacBride	02/06/2008	
	Mr B McAllister	02/06/2008	
	Mrs B McDougall	02/06/2008	
	Mr M Nesbitt	02/06/2008	17/02/2010
Commissioner for Older People	Mrs C Keatinge	14/11/2011	
Economic Research Institute of NI Ltd	Dr I McMorris	19/08/2008 (R)	24/02/2010
	Mr J McKenna	26/02/2010	
	Mr D Prince	26/02/2010	09/11/2010
Ilex Urban Regeneration Company Ltd	Sir RW McNulty	01/10/2007	
	Professor R J Sterling	01/10/2007	24/07/2009
	Mr T J Fanning	01/04/2008	08/12/2009
	Mr M McNulty	01/04/2008	
	Mrs V Watt	01/10/2008	28/02/2011
	Mr K Alexander	09/03/2009	31/07/2009
	Mr M Heaney	28/07/2009 (R)	
	Mr J McDaid	28/07/2009 (R)	13/07/2011
	Professor D Heenan	01/08/2009	
	Dr A McGinley	08/09/2009	
	Mr F A Hewitt	01/07/2010	
	Dame G M M Keegan	01/07/2010	
	Mrs M Lee	01/07/2010	
	Mr C C McKenna	01/07/2010	
	Sir R W McNulty	01/10/2010(R)	

Body/Office	Appointees	Date Appointed	Date Left
Ilex Urban Regeneration Company Ltd	Mr J Meehan	18/02/2011	25/10/2011
	Mr M McNulty	01/04/2011	
	Ms S O'Connor	26/10/2011	
Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission	M J McNulty	15/06/2011	
	Mr A Rankin	15/06/2011	
Strategic Investment Board Ltd	Mr D Gavaghan	21/07/2007 (R)	30/04/2010
	Mr D Dobbin	01/10/2008 (R) Board Member	31/03/2009 Board Member
	Mr D Dobbin	01/04/2009 Acting Chairperson	17/11/2009 Acting Chairperson
	Mr D Dobbin	18/11/2009 Chairperson	
	Mr R Hannam	04/01/2009 (R)	
	Mr F A Hewitt	01/12/2010	
	Ms G McAteer	01/11/2009	
	Mr A J McFerran	01/11/2009	
	Mr D Rooney	01/11/2009	
	Mr C Thompson	01/12/2010	
	Mr D J Waugh	01/11/2009	31/05/2011
Planning & Water Appeals Commissions	Mr A Allen	02/01/2008	
	Mr A Allen	02/01/2011 (R)	19/10/2011
	Mr D K Beggan	01/09/2008	31/08/2011
	Mr A R Beggs	15/09/2008	
	Mr G S Carlisle	01/09/2008	31/08/2011
	Mr M J Culshaw	01/09/2008	31/08/2011
	Mr A J Dale	01/09/2008	31/08/2011
	Ms R Daly	15/09/2008	
	Ms J de-Courcey	02/01/2008	
	Mr M W Evans	01/09/2008	31/08/2011
	Mr I B Fernie	05/04/2010 (R)	
	Mrs S J Glover	01/09/2008	31/08/2011
	Mr D Hainsworth	01/09/2008	31/08/2011
	Mrs S E Hesketh	01/09/2008	31/08/2011
	Mrs S M Holden	01/09/2008	31/08/2011
	Mr N P Howard	21/03/2008 (R)	
	Mr N P Howard	21/03/2011 (R)	
	Mr M C Hurley	01/09/2008	31/08/2011
	Mrs A R Jones	15/09/2008	
	Mr J B Martin	28/04/2008	

Body/Office	Appointees	Date Appointed	Date Left
Planning & Water Appeals Commissions	Mr J H Martin	01/09/2008	31/08/2011
	Ms D M MacGabhann	01/09/2008	31/08/2011
	Mr A L McCooey	28/04/2008	
	Mr D F McCoy	01/09/2008	31/08/2011
	Mrs B McGlinchey	07/01/2008	
	Mr S G O'Hare	28/04/2008	
	Miss P O'Donnell	07/01/2008	
	Mr D Storrie	01/09/2008	31/08/2011
	Mr M Watson	07/01/2008	
Attorney General for Northern Ireland	Mr J Larkin QC	24/05/2010	
Commissioner for Public Appointments	Mrs F Huston	01/08/2008 (R)	31 /07/2011
Commissioner for Public Appointments	Mr John Keanie	01/08/2011	

Shackleton Barracks

Mr Dallat asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what provision has been made to cover the cost of decontaminating the site of the Shackleton army barracks at Ballykelly.
(AQW 4951/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Experience from previous military sites and documents provided by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) indicate the likely presence of contamination at Shackleton.

It is not possible at this stage to make a reliable estimate for the cost of any decontamination as such detailed determination depends on the final uses for the site.

City of Culture 2013

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given the terminology used in the draft Programme for Government, whether it is Executive policy to delete the reference to the United Kingdom in referring to Londonderry being the UK City of Culture 2013; and, if so, why this is the case.
(AQW 5051/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: No such policy has been determined by the Executive.

Shared Future

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) to outline the measures they have taken since coming into office. or plan to take, to promote a shared future; and (ii) whether they will consider implementing a policy appraisal whereby their Department will screen and policy-proof all policies and spending decisions for the impact on good relations and the creation of a shared future.
(AQW 5260/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Under the Northern Ireland Act 1998, all departments are required to fulfil the statutory duty to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

In this regard, all departments are required to consider how all policy development and spending decisions contribute to promoting good relations.

The approach to mainstreaming good relations considerations into policy development and resource allocation will be considered as part of the overall development of the final Cohesion, Sharing and Integration strategy.

As a designated public authority, OFMDFM is required to set out in an equality scheme how it proposes to fulfil the duties imposed by Section 75 in relation to its relevant functions.

OFMDFM is committed to the discharge of its Section 75 obligations in all parts of the organisation and will continue to commit the available resources in terms of people, time and money to ensure that the Section 75 statutory duties are complied with and that the equality scheme is implemented effectively.

In addition, we have significantly increased funding for good relations work since devolution, supporting the Community Relations Council and local Council good relations programmes, along with organisations and projects such as Contested Spaces and Re-imaging Communities.

Poverty and Social Inclusion

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how their Department can promote transparency when the minutes from the Ministerial-led Poverty and Social Inclusion Stakeholder Forum are not produced in a timely manner, particularly the minutes of the meetings between March and October 2011.
(AQW 5373/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Minutes of the meetings of the Ministerial-led Poverty and Social Inclusion Stakeholder Forum are not made public, as matters discussed can relate to policy still under development. Such matters may be exempt from disclosure under Freedom of Information as it is necessary to allow frank and open discussions about policy options without compromising the policy formulation process.

The Child Poverty Strategy (CPS), for example, provides a unique opportunity for the Poverty and Social Inclusion Stakeholder Forum to contribute to the delivery of policy through its role in agreeing a CPS Action Plan. This demonstrates a higher level of transparency and inclusiveness and gives practical effect to the joint production of delivery mechanisms by Government and key stakeholders.

Officials and Junior Ministers maintain open channels of communication between meetings with members of the Forum who wish to raise issues related to the work of the Forum.

The next meeting of the Forum is scheduled to take place in January 2012.

Social Protection Fund

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the time-scale for notification of the outcome of departmental bids to the Social Protection Fund, which includes funding for young people and lone parent work experience programmes.
(AQW 5440/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Executive proposed a Social Protection Fund to mitigate against the impact of the financial cuts on the most vulnerable in our society.

The Executive agreed to prioritise fuel poverty through this fund and agreed that the £20 million would contribute towards a fuel allowance scheme distributed through DSD and DHSSPS.

Commissioner for Older People

Mr G Robinson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the development of strategies to tackle fuel poverty among the elderly is within the remit of the Commissioner for Older People.
(AQO 937/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Fuel poverty has an impact on a range of vulnerable groups including older people. Responsibility for the development of strategies to tackle fuel poverty rests with the Department for Social Development.

Claire Keatinge took up her post as Commissioner for Older People on 14th November 2011 and has a wide range of duties including promotional, advisory and educational responsibilities which will be deployed in the interests of older people, both generally and individually. This clearly could include advocating or supporting the development of policies to tackle fuel poverty.

As Commissioner, Claire will be able to influence strategies by contributing through the consultation process and if considered necessary, she can challenge any proposals that may have a negative impact on older citizens.

Programme for Government

Mr McQuillan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the monitoring arrangements for the Programme for Government.
(AQO 932/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: This Programme for Government (PfG) has, as a prerequisite, clearly defined lines of accountability, effective monitoring and reporting regimes.

At a delivery level, monitoring will be the responsibility of the Delivery Oversight Group, chaired by the Head of the Civil Service. The Head of the Civil Service is, with the support of Permanent Secretaries, tasked with driving programme delivery and ensuring constancy of direction and purpose.

At Programme level, the PfG Programme Board, which we jointly chair and is attended by the Minister of Finance and Personnel, will have the primary monitoring responsibility.

OFMDFM officials, in conjunction with officials in the Department of Finance and Personnel, are preparing detailed guidance which explains the new framework for delivery of PfG commitments. We intend to bring this guidance to the Executive as soon as possible with a view to seeking agreement and subsequent implementation.

The new framework for delivery is designed to ensure that there is the maximum amount of delivery against the commitments while enabling departments to make significant progress against targets.

The previous Programme for Government – which contained 334 PSA targets and 66 Key Goals and Commitments – presented a heavy bureaucratic burden in terms of reporting. In designing our new PfG, we have consciously sought to alleviate this burden without compromising the effectiveness of our monitoring and reporting activities.

It is our intention that monitoring and reporting will continue on a regular basis throughout the lifetime of the Programme for Government. Our Department, along with the Department of Finance and Personnel, will have operational responsibility for this, and it is intended that all Ministers will monitor and report progress to Executive colleagues at agreed intervals.

Programme for Government

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 5020/11-15, to detail the date, time and location of each of the planned public meetings on the draft Programme for Government; and the agenda for each meeting.
(AQW 5548/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: It is anticipated that there will be seven public meetings as part of the consultation process for the draft Programme for Government, as listed below. Dates and venues are indicative and subject to booking confirmation.

The agenda for each meeting will ultimately be determined by attendees, but will be framed around an introductory session; a general question and answer session; a discussion on priorities and commitments and final responses, observations and questions.

Date	
Monday 9 January	Omagh – Omagh Enterprise Centre
Monday 16 January	Newry - N&M Enterprise Agency
Monday 23 January	Derry/Londonderry - Millennium Forum
Monday 30 January	Belfast - Malone House
Monday 6 February	Armagh – Upper English Street
Monday 13 February	Enniskillen - Clinton Centre
Monday 20 February	Ballymena – Ballymena Business Centre

St Andrews Agreement: Review

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 3228/11-15, whether the option of reducing the number of North South implementation bodies is being considered under the first term of reference of the St Andrews Review.
(AQW 5599/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: As we reported to the Assembly on 29 November 2011, the NSMC agreed at its 13th Plenary meeting on 18 November that a number of proposals under the first element of the Review would be discussed at the next round of NSMC meetings in sectoral format with a view to decisions being taken at the NSMC Plenary meeting in June 2012.

This matter therefore remains under consideration and, in accordance with the statutory provisions, a report on progress will be made to the Assembly following the next NSMC Plenary.

Government Contracts: Social Clauses

Mr G Kelly asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of the commitments set out in the draft Programme for Government, if they will engage with the Minister of Finance and Personnel, to ensure that any advice coming from the Central Procurement Directorate, recommends the inclusion of social clauses in all contracts.
(AQO 930/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Building on the last Programme for Government, our new Programme commits us to include social clauses in all public procurement contracts for supplies, services and construction. The targets set will vary from contract to contract.

The Minister of Finance & Personnel has an important role in helping to take this policy forward and given that the Central Procurement Directorate comes under his control then we will be engaging with him and with all Executive colleagues so as to ensure that we get the maximum social return on our investment.

Given the financial constrains that the Executive has to operate under then we believe that it makes good sense for us to get the maximum value from the money that we have at our disposal. Where we can we will ensure that local companies can bid for contracts and through the use of social clauses we can help deliver on our social agenda which includes a commitment to those most disadvantaged within our communities.

By integrating social clauses into procurement policy, it is clear that in many cases we will be able to provide employment and training opportunities for those furthest from the labour market and in areas of high social need. By reinforcing the commitment in our new Programme for Government, we are sending a clear sign that this is no longer an aspiration. It is now a requirement.

Social Protection Fund

Mr W Clarke asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Social Protection Fund.
(AQO 934/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: As stated within the draft Programme for Government, the Executive remains committed to tackling the problem of disadvantage here.

The Executive agreed to allocate the £20 million Social Protection Fund to the priority issue of fuel poverty and this will be distributed through DSD and DHSSPS for fuel poverty payments.

Bill of Rights: United Kingdom

Mr McGimpsey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the discussions they have had with Her Majesty's Government in relation to Northern Ireland's input to a United Kingdom Bill of Rights.
(AQO 935/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Kenneth Clarke, the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, wrote to us to advise that the Coalition Government was setting up an independent commission to investigate the creation of a potential UK Bill of Rights.

This process is separate from the one established under the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement regarding a Bill of Rights here. The Human Rights Commission fulfilled its responsibility to make proposals on supplementary rights here, when it submitted its report to the Secretary of State on 8 December 2008. The UK Government consulted on proposals for a Bill of Rights here and the consultation responses were published in December 2010.

An advisory group to the Commission on a proposed UK Bill of Rights, comprising representatives of the devolved administrations, is also being set up. We have been asked for two nominees to the panel and we are considering who they should be.

We understand that the Commission will not be asked to consider the scope for specific supplementary rights here. However, it will clearly need to consider how any proposals it makes in respect of the UK will impact on the responsibilities of the devolved administrations.

Military Sites: Audit Office Report

Mr Dallat asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action they intend to take as a result of the report by the Audit Office on the sale, use and management of six former military sites.
(AQO 938/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The NIAO report on the transfer of former military and security sites to the Executive will be the subject of a Public Accounts Committee hearing. In line with agreed protocols on handling such matters it would therefore not be appropriate for us to make any comments on the report until the Assembly process is complete.

It would be our intention to put in place a strategy for implementation of the relevant recommendations outlined in the report.

Military Sites: Audit Office Report

Mrs Cochrane asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the audit report on the gifting of military sites by the Ministry of Defence.
(AQO 939/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The NIAO report on the transfer of former military and security sites to the Executive will be the subject of a Public Accounts Committee hearing. In line with agreed protocols on handling such matters it would therefore not be appropriate for us to make any comments on the report until the Assembly process is complete.

Child Poverty Strategy

Mr McKay asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Outcomes Model associated with the Child Poverty Strategy Action Plan.
(AQO 941/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: During the third meeting of the re-established Ministerial-led Poverty and Social Inclusion Stakeholder Forum, which took place on 27 October 2011, members considered an outcomes model approach to be used in developing the Children's Strategy and Child Poverty Strategy action plans.

Social Protection Fund

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how they will use the Social Protection Fund to help people facing hardship caused by the economic downturn.
(AQW 5752/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Executive proposed a Social Protection Fund to mitigate against the impact of the financial cuts on the most vulnerable in our society.

The Executive subsequently agreed to prioritise fuel poverty through this fund and agreed that the £20 million budget would contribute towards a Winter poverty payment scheme, distributed through DSD and DHSSPS.

Childcare: Funding

Ms Ruane asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether any of the £3 million set aside for childcare, that is not spent this year, will be ring-fenced and re-profiled in future years of the Comprehensive Spending Review period.
(AQO 974/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We plan to put more detailed proposals on the development of the Childcare Strategy to the Executive early in the New Year.

These proposals will clarify what improvements are needed, and how we intend to deliver the essential changes to transform childcare provision.

The Executive will also need to agree the re-profiling of the additional £12m allocation to the Childcare Fund, which is an Executive Fund to support the development of the Childcare Strategy.

We remain committed to ensuring proper investment in childcare and are working with departments to develop proposals for early investment across government that will improve provision and support the development of the Childcare Strategy.

Holocaust Memorial Day

Ms P Bradley asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline their Department's plans to mark Holocaust Memorial Day 2012.
(AQO 979/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The regional commemoration to mark the Holocaust Memorial Day in 2012 will be held on Thursday 26 January at the Theatre at the Mill, Newtownabbey. This will be the eleventh year we have commemorated Holocaust Memorial Day.

Social Investment Fund: Armagh City

Mr Irwin asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the Social Investment Fund will assist in the social development and regeneration of the community in the east of Armagh City.
(AQO 980/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The outcome of the public consultation process, which ends on 23 December 2011, will inform how the Social Investment Fund will operate and how specific areas and communities will benefit.

Through SIF, areas in need will benefit from a co-ordinated and strategic approach to issues of poverty and disadvantage. It will enable communities to determine the priorities in their areas and develop responses in partnership with Government, the statutory sector and the voluntary and community sector.

North/South Ministerial Council: Constitutional Convention

Mr Dallat asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether any discussions have been held at recent North-South Ministerial Council meetings regarding the Constitutional Convention planned by the Irish Government and the necessity of Northern Ireland's participation within this convention.
(AQO 981/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: No discussion has taken place at meetings of the North South Ministerial Council on the Irish Government's proposed Constitutional Convention.

Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation

Mr McCartney asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the establishment of the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation.
(AQO 982/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A public appointment competition for the Maze Long Kesh Development Corporation is currently underway and we will announce the outcome of the competition in due course.

Victims and Survivors Service

Mr Molloy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on establishing the Victims and Survivors Service.
(AQO 985/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: This remains a key issue for this Department and all available resource is being used to ensure that when the Service is established it reflects the needs and demands of the Sector.

We are determined to meet key targets such as the phased introduction to individual assessments starting in April 2012. Key milestones have been achieved and transition arrangements are being considered to ensure there is no gap in support to the Sector.

The Commission for Victims and Survivors and officials are working closely together to ensure that the Service is fit for purpose and appropriately resourced.

Junior Minister Anderson and Junior Minister Bell also chair monthly meetings with the Commission and officials to ensure the establishment of the new Service by April 2012.

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy

Mr Flanagan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the work of the cross-party Working Group on the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration strategy.
(AQO 986/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Party leaders agreed to the establishment of the cross party working group on Cohesion, Sharing and Integration in June of this year and representatives from each of the five main parties were nominated.

The group held its first meeting on 27 September and continues to meet on a weekly basis. Members initially received a presentation outlining the main findings from the independent analysis of the consultation. They have used this information to identify a work programme that will enable them to fully consider the detail of the various issues that have been raised.

The priority now is to establish a political consensus and agree on the strategic direction against the issues raised by the consultation.

The cross party working group will continue to work over the coming weeks with a view to publishing the final strategy and an associated action plan in early 2012.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Rural Poverty

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) how much money has been earmarked to combat rural poverty in the current budgetary period; and (ii) to detail the rural poverty incentives her Department has supported in the last twelve months, broken down by council area.
(AQW 5137/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): £16m has been allocated by DARD to tackle rural poverty and isolation in the current budgetary period. In the last financial year (2010-11) DARD supported the following initiatives: Rural Community Development; the Maximising Access to Grants, Services and Benefits initiative; the Assisted Rural Travel Scheme; rural broadband; the rural support charity; rural childcare programme and rural challenge programme. Measures have not been targeted specifically by council area. The information that is available at district council level is set out in the following tables:

A: Rural Community Development

Council Area	Rural Support Network funded
Antrim and Newtownabbey	South Antrim
Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon	Armagh, Down and Antrim
Strabane, Derry	Strabane and District

Council Area	Rural Support Network funded
Down, North Down, Ards, Newry and Mourne and east of Banbridge	East Down Community
Ballymena, Coleraine, Limavady, Moyle	North Antrim Community
Fermanagh	Fermanagh Rural Community
Omagh	Omagh Forum for Rural Associations
Cookstown and Magherafelt	Cookstown and Western Shores
Dungannon	Community Organisations of South Tyrone and area.

B: Maximising Access to Grant, Benefits and Services

Council area	No. of household visits tageted
Moyle	250
Coleraine	50
Larne	50
Ballymoney	100
Cookstown	300
Magherafelt	50
Antrim	100
Down	250
Newtownards	250
Dungannon	250
Craigavon	50
Armagh	200
Newry and Mourne	750
Strabane	484
Derry	150
Omagh	350
Fermanagh	216
Limavady	350

C: Assisted Rural Travel Scheme

Rural Community Transport Partnership	Council Catchment Areas	Funded Trips in 10/11
ART	Armagh District Council Area;	6,857
DART	Banbridge District Council Area; Craigavon District Council Area;	2,013
NMCT	Newry and Mourne District Council Area;	4,846
CRCT	Cookstown District Council Area;	7,943
DDCT	Dungannon and South Tyrone District Council Area;	6,445
OACT	Magherafelt District Council Area;	12,124
DDAT	Down District Council Area; Ards District Council Area; North Down District Council Area;	14,586

Rural Community Transport Partnership	Council Catchment Areas	Funded Trips in 10/11
EASILINK	Strabane District Council Area; Derry City Council Area	15,511
	Omagh District Council Area;	8,250
NCCT	Limavady District Council Area	7,850
	Coleraine District Council Area; Ballymoney District Council Area;	2,073
	Moyle District Council Area; Ballymena District Council Area;	6,807
FAST	Fermanagh District Council Area;	10,415
RURAL LIFT	Fermanagh District Council Area	10,980
LVRT	Lisburn District Council Area; Castlereagh District Council Area;	3,833
SACT	Larne District Council Area: Carrickfergus District Council Area; Antrim District Council Area; Newtownabbey District Council Area	7,249
Totals		**127,782**

D: Rural Childcare Programme

Beneficiary Council Area	Project Promoter funded
Antrim and Ballymena	Taylorstown Cross Community Complex
Antrim and Magherafelt	Laughterland Playgroup
Newry and Mourne	South Armagh Childcare Consortium
North Down	Glencraig Integrated Children's Centre
Newry and Mourne	Sticky Fingers Early Years Arts
Down	Ballykinlar Cross Community Playgroup
Ards	Carrowdore Early Years Centre
Derry	Positive Futures
Newry and Mourne, Banbridge, Dungannon, Fermanagh, Omagh, Derry, Moyle, Ballymena, Larne, Coleraine, Ballymoney, Ards, Down, Lisburn, Strabane	Northern Ireland Childminders Association
Fermanagh	ARC Healthy Living Centre Ltd
Fermanagh	Glendurragh Childcare Services Ltd
Derry	Tiny Tots Community Playgroup
Coleraine	Glenullin Childcare Trust
Magherafelt, Cookstown, Omagh	Barnardo's Children's First Centre
Derry	Claudy Rural Development
Omagh	Omagh Early Years
Omagh Dungannon	Eskra Childcare Ltd
Omagh	Naiscoil na Gcrann
Dungannon	Rainbow Daycare (Eglish) Ltd

E: Rural Challenge Programme Appendix 2

Beneficiary Council Area	Project Promoter funded
Ards	Millisle & District Community Association
Armagh	County Armagh Community Development Committee Limited Singing Kettle STEP South Tyrone Empowerment Programme x 2 projects
Ballymena	Community Network Women's Aid Bannside Community Safety Group Community Focus Learning
Ballymoney	Rasharkin Community Association Loughgiel Community Association Ballymoney Community Resource Centre
Banbridge	Katesbridge Community Association
Belfast	National Autistic Society The Cedar Foundation Shopmobility Belfast
Coleraine	Age Concern Coleraine
Cookstown	Ardboe Community Projects Kingsmill Co-ordinating Committee Broughderg Area Development Association Ltd Age Concern Cookstown
Craigavon	TADA Rural Support network DART Partnership
Derry	St Columb's Park House Derry Healthy Cities/Health NW RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People) Bridge Accessible Transport Aware Defeat Depression x 3 projects
Down	Kilcoo Community Association
Dungannon & South Tyrone	Killyman St Mary's G.F.C Cappagh Village Regeneration Group Niamh Louise Foundation
Fermanagh	BOHO Community Association Educational Guidance Service for Adults (EGSA) Fermanagh Womens Aid Naiscoil na Traonaigh Erne East Community Partnership LTD Mummers Foundation
Limavady	Hands That Talk x 2 projects Gortnaghey Community Association Dromboughil Community Association
Lisburn	Magheragall 50 plus Group Moira Friendship Group
Magherafelt	Glasgowbury Music Group The Rural College and Derrynoid Moneyneena Senior Citizens Group Naiscoil Mhachaire Ratha Carntoger Community Association Granaghan & District Women's Group

Beneficiary Council Area	Project Promoter funded
Moyle	Glenarm Youth Club Glenariff Improvement Group Cuhendall Development Group
Newry & Mourne	Crossmaglen Rangers GFC South Armagh Childcare Consortium FARM Support Group
North Down	Growing Connections NI
Omagh	RNIB NI x 2 projects Sperrin Carers Support Group Naiscoil na gcrann Mountfield Community Association Greencastle St Patrick's GFC Creagan Research and Education Camowen Farmers Combined Ltd. Nippers Alley Playgroup Sixmilecross Enterprise Ltd x 2 projects
Strabane	Strabane and District Community network The Plum Club Castlederg Youth Forum DERG Valley Care Ltd x 3 projects Dennett Interchange LTD Strabane & District Playclub

Rural Childcare Demands

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what measures her Department has put in place to meet rural childcare demands.
(AQW 5138/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As you know DARD does not hold primary responsibility for Childcare service provision. As part of the Department's wider poverty and social inclusion work DARD ran the Rural Childcare Programme as an innovative pilot programme which aimed to enhance the rural evidence base for the development of future policy and priorities in the area of rural childcare provision. A composite evaluation of the programme will shortly be available and as I have previously committed I will present to OFMDFM who are leading development of the new Childcare Strategy for the North.

There are ongoing opportunities under Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 for childcare project infrastructure expansion or piloting of new initiatives.

I will continue to press OFMDFM for the need for the new Childcare Strategy, and associated action plan, and to ensure that the very specific circumstances of rural areas are provided for. I would welcome any information that you have to evidence the rural childcare demand.

Rural Poverty

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the rural poverty measures implemented by her Department in the Upper Bann constituency in each of the last four years.
(AQW 5139/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department successfully delivered a £10m package of measures in the last budget period (2008/09-2010/11) to address rural poverty and social exclusion across the following initiatives: community development; rural challenge programme; maximising access to grants, benefits and services fuel poverty; rural transport; broadband; childcare; and the rural support charity. Measures were not targeted by parliamentary constituency although some detail is available.

This includs funding to the Armagh, Down and Antrim (TADA) Rural Network to assist rural community development across an area inclusive of the Upper Bann constituency. Home heating systems were installed in 41 properties in the Upper Bann constituency during 2008/09 and 24 properties received home insulation in 2009/10.

Two projects were successful in 2009/10 in securing small grants under the rural challenge programme and these projects were delivered by end 2010/11 - funding of c£3,100 was awarded to the Armagh, Down and Antrim (TADA) Rural Network and c£4,400 to Down and Armagh Rural Transport Partnership (DART).

One Super Output Area (The Birches) in the Upper Bann constituency area was also included for intervention (target 50 vulnerable households) through the Maximising Access to Grants, Benefits & Services Project.

Also through the Assisted Rural Travel Scheme (ARTS) approximately 3,435 individual passenger journeys were funded by DARD (352 in 2009/10 and 3,083 in 2010/11) in the Upper Bann constituency and delivered by the Down, Armagh Rural Transport Partnership (DART). No childcare or broadband projects were supported in the Upper Bann constituency from rural poverty measures and information on rural support beneficiaries is not available.

West Belfast: Spend by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail her Department's, and its arm's-length bodies', spend in the West Belfast constituency in each of the last three years; and the proposed spend for each year until 2015.
(AQW 5223/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The tables below detail the actual and proposed spend in the West Belfast constituency by my Department, and its arm's-length bodies.

Actual Funding between 2008 and 2011:-

Financial Year	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Amount	£214,804	£594,098	£197,340

Proposed funding between 2011 and 2015:-

Financial Year	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Amount	£234,580	£263,605	£266,584	£235,390

Note: estimates on proposed funding include potential Single Farm Payments (SFP) in the West Belfast constituency. However, this forecasted spend would be subject to any changes to the SFP Scheme under the EU Agricultural Policy Reform programme for 2013 and beyond, which is currently the subject of consultation amongst EU Member States.

Hedgerows

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her Department's policy to encourage farmers to plant more hedgerows.
(AQW 5240/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department recognises the importance of well-managed hedges in our landscape, which provide food and shelter for wildlife and act as a barrier to livestock. DARD's agri-environment schemes encourage farmers to plant hedges as part of a positive programme for hedge restoration and regeneration. One aspect of Field Boundary Restoration is hedge planting and scheme participants receive payments in return for planting a new hedge or gaps in an existing hedge. Scheme participants are required to plant a mix of native hedge and tree plant species and protect the new plants from grazing animals and weeds. All hedge restoration and planting must follow the exact line of an original boundary.

Agri-environment scheme participants restore over 500 km of hedgerows annually.

Shared Future

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) to outline the measures she has taken since coming into office. or plans to take, to promote a shared future; and (ii) whether she will consider implementing a policy appraisal whereby her Department will screen and policy-proof all policies and spending decisions for the impact on good relations and the creation of a shared future.
(AQW 5244/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: DARD has historically supported community development in rural areas through the Rural Community Network (RCN), the NI Women's Rural Network (NIRWN) and local Rural Support Networks (RSNs) of which there are currently 9 which all play a key role in promoting good relations in rural areas. Over the current budget period DARD provided £2.5m to support community development.

Under the NI Act 1998, we are required to fulfil the statutory duty to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. In this regard, we are required to consider how all policy development and spending decisions contribute to promoting good relations.

As a Department we remain fully committed to equality and good relations and to meeting the commitments in our new Equality Scheme, which has been approved by the Equality Commission for NI. We take our Section 75 statutory duties seriously as a public authority, promoting equality of opportunity and good relations, and also in making equality central to our public policy decision making and when delivering expenditure programmes.

All individual DARD policies are equality screened to identify those policies that are likely to have an impact on equality of opportunity and / or good relations. If our screening assessment concludes that the likely impact of a policy is 'major' in respect of one, or more, of the equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, we will subject the policy to an equality impact assessment.

The approach to mainstreaming good relations considerations into policy development and resource allocation will also be considered as part of the development of the final Cohesion, Sharing and Integration strategy.

Lough Neagh

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her Department's assessment of the potential impact of altering the levels, as detailed in the Lough Neagh Levels Scheme (1955), to reduce flooding caused by rivers which flow into Lough Neagh.
(AQW 5356/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The current control range operated for the Lough Neagh levels was identified to meet the balance between the needs of many different stakeholders. Reducing the water levels of Lough Neagh from the current control range would potentially have an adverse impact on commercial, environmental and recreational interests. There is additionally no guarantee that reducing the lough levels would prevent all flooding experienced on lands adjacent to the tributaries that flow into the Lough.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) her Department's target for the reduction of Bovine Tuberculosis in each of the next five years; (ii) whether her Department expects to meet the targets; and (iii) what saving will be made if the targets are met.
(AQW 5360/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Department does not have a target for the reduction of Bovine TB in each of the next 5 years for the reason outlined below.

On 22 July 2010 the Executive agreed to the amendment of the Public Service Agreement (PSA) TB indicator to remove the existing measurement and create a new target for TB. The previous target was to achieve a 27% reduction in TB annual herd incidence during the period 2008-2011. The new TB target that was approved by the Executive was to implement our section of the 2010 Bovine TB Eradication Plan and to maintain eligibility for the EU co-funding of the plan.

The approved amendment to the TB target was necessary to take account of a change in policy to achieve EU Commission approval to our 2010 Eradication Plan. The new policy introduced on 1 January 2010 was to remove as reactors those animals that give an inconclusive result to a second consecutive TB test, rather than a third test as previously. For disease predictions based on past data to remain valid, the key policies in place must remain unchanged, otherwise it is not possible to compare like with like. This was accepted by the Executive

Whilst the period of this target ended in March 2011, my Department continues to have an objective to achieve and maintain annual EU Commission approval for our TB Eradication Plan. EU Commission approval of our TB Eradication Plan is vital in protecting our annual £1,000 million plus export-dependent trade in livestock and livestock products. It also enables my Department to be eligible to draw down some €5 million co-funding in relation to each of the 2010, 2011 and, recently approved, 2012 Eradication Plans to offset the cost of the programme. This also means that my Department complies with the Public Accounts Committee recommendation on this point.

My Department continues to closely monitor disease levels and disease incidence figures are published each month on the Department's website. Our TB herd incidence was 5.30% at 31 October 2011.

I am pleased that considerable progress has been made in reducing TB incidence in cattle here from its peak of around 10% in 2002. My aim is to reduce and ultimately eradicate TB in cattle here and I will continue to work towards this end.

Fishing: Irish Sea

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to provide details of (i) her recent discussions with the Director General of DG Mare in Brussels; (ii) any follow-up action her Department is taking to ensure there is no ambiguity in relation to fisheries in the Irish Sea and based in Northern Ireland, specifically in respect of the positive science and measures already taken by the local fleet to reduce discards.
(AQW 5399/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I met with Lowri Evans, Director General of DG Maritime Affairs and Fisheries on 14 November when I attended the Agriculture and Fisheries Council in Brussels. I highlighted difficulties with the proposed zero TAC on cod in Irish Sea and emergency technical measures. I also stressed the importance of the Area VII Nephrops to the local fleet and set out the case for a rollover in the TAC. On Irish Sea Herring I challenged the Commission's proposal to cut this TAC by 25% on grounds that it was "data poor" pointing out the considerable body of information there was on the stock. This is described in some detail in a paper produced by AFBI. That paper will be submitted by DEFRA to the Commission together with other evidence on stocks which the Commission regard as "data poor".

In terms of discards, the Commission has seen the results of the gear trails carried out on square mesh panels which significantly reduced by-catches of haddock and whiting by more than 50%. This information is being considered in the context of the proposed emergency technical measures. I accept that there is more that our fleet could do to reduce discards in the Nephrops fishery through more selective fishing gears and my Department has, through the European Fisheries Fund committed finance to undertake further gear trials in partnership with the industry early in the New Year.

Fishing: Irish Sea

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the lines of communication between the Sea Fisheries Division within her Department, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the European Commission, that are used to convey the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute's positive assessment of fish stocks in the Irish Sea, such as herring, and the developments by the local fleet to reduce discards.
(AQW 5400/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: AFBI scientists have provided a paper on the findings of the enhanced survey work for submission to the Commission which seeks to justify an increase to the TAC for this stock. This has been sent to DEFRA and will be submitted to the Commission together with other papers on stocks which the Commission regard as "data poor". Details of previous trials on square mesh panels have been sent to the Commission directly by DARD. It is understood that the Commission is considering these findings in relation to its proposed "emergency technical measures" for the Irish Sea which may be published in the New Year.

Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how her Department will help the Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and other charities to deal with any increase in neglected animals during the recession.
(AQW 5403/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Animal welfare in the north is regulated under the Welfare of Animals Act 1972 and the Welfare of Animals Act 2011, as currently commenced. Under this legislation, my Department has responsibility for enforcement in respect of farmed animals and the PSNI has responsibility for the welfare of non-farmed animals. At present, the PSNI is the only organisation which has powers to seize animals which are suffering, or are likely to suffer if their circumstances do not change. When animals are seized, the PSNI has responsibility for the care of these animals while they remain seized. When carrying out these statutory duties, the PSNI can obtain assistance from animal charities such as the Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (USPCA). The PSNI therefore make the necessary financial arrangements with these organisations.

The USPCA and other animal charities are funded by voluntary donations. My Department does not provide funding to any of these organisations.

From 2 April 2012, Councils here will have responsibility for enforcement in respect of non-farmed animals, including horses, under the new Welfare of Animals Act 2011. My Department will continue to work closely with all the relevant agencies to protect the welfare of animals in the north.

Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what support her Department is offering the Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and other charities, in the rescue and rehabilitation of the neglected horses found recently on a farm in Co. Antrim.
(AQW 5404/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Animal welfare here is regulated under the Welfare of Animals Act 1972 and the Welfare of Animals Act 2011, as currently commenced. Under this legislation, currently only the PSNI has powers to seize animals which are suffering or likely to suffer if their circumstances do not change. When carrying out these statutory duties the PSNI can obtain assistance from voluntary organisations as it sees fit, including from animal charities such as the Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (USPCA).

Regarding the recent animal welfare case in County Antrim, on receiving the initial complaint Veterinary Inspectors from my Department responded immediately and were the first on the scene. As there were no farmed animals in distress they contacted the local PSNI and remained on-site until the PSNI arrived and took over lead responsibility for this case.

I understand that a number of welfare organisations, including the Donkey Sanctuary and Crosskennan Lane Animal Sanctuary, stepped in at the request of the PSNI and provided assistance with the rescue, transportation and on-going needs of the animals.

My Department's Veterinary Service is continuing to liaise with the PSNI on this case and may be called upon in support of an eventual prosecution.

Mill Race: Doagh

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she is taking to ensure that appropriate compensation is in place following the blocking of the Mill Race in Doagh.
(AQW 5408/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Rivers Agency has no record of any incident involving the blocking of the Mill Race in Doagh and no reports of any flooding at this location. There are therefore no plans for payment of compensation.

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department would consider commissioning a study to determine the impact that hydraulic fracturing could have on the beef and dairy farming industries.
(AQW 5436/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am aware that exploration for potential gas fields is regulated and that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is responsible for granting exploration licenses.

Planning permission would be necessary before any drilling or hydraulic fracturing operations could take place. It is likely that a detailed environmental impact assessment would be required as part of any planning application. An assessment would have to take into account the impact that hydraulic fracturing could have on the beef and dairy industries, as well as the impacts on water, landscape and the tourism industry.

Should any planning permission be sought in future for drilling or hydraulic fracturing operations my Department would be a consultee on the planning application. My Department would want to ensure that any potential impact on the farming industry was fully considered and addressed.

At this stage I am both personally and politically concerned about the process of hydraulic fracturing and its potential impact on environment on the island of Ireland.

DARD: Information Service

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many staff are employed in her Department's Information Service; and what is the annual cost of this service.
(AQW 5437/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development operates its Information Service via Media Services Branch which is made up of two sections, the Press Office and the Graphics Unit. There is a total of 14 staff employed in the Information Service and the total salary costs for 2010/11 were £385,505.

Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether fisheries science staff of the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute will be back to their full complement by the end of the year.
(AQW 5457/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute has confirmed that it has procedures in place to ensure that by the end of the year (31 March 2012) it will have the full complement of fisheries science staff required to carry out its work programmes.

DARD: European Commission Disallowances

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to provide further clarity on the reasons for the disallowances imposed on her Department by the European Commission in relation to Single Farm Payments.
(AQW 5468/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In my statement to the Assembly on 21 November, I highlighted the reasons for the disallowances being imposed by the Commission.

By way of clarification, following an area aids (land eligibility) audit in 2006 audit, the Commission advised that 3 areas of control were causing them concern. These related to:

- the farm mapping system
- the on-the-spot checks carried out by the Department's inspectors; and
- the application of regulatory sanctions and recovery,

The most recent disallowance confirmed by the Commission relates to the allocation of Single Farm Payment entitlements and follows audits in 2006 and 2008. The Commission raised its concerns regarding:

- the methods used by DARD to scale back and assess awards from the National Reserve;
- entitlements having been allocated to the wrong beneficiary in conacre situations;
- land not in agricultural use was used to establish entitlements;
- entitlements were established on an area less than the overall area declared;
- an overrun of the regional ceiling.

Dog Licences

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline any plans that her Department has for dog licences.
(AQW 5470/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Earlier this year, the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011 amended the Dogs Order 1983. The amendments made a number of changes to the dog licensing system here including: introducing the power for dog wardens to attach control conditions to individual dog licences where breaches of the Dogs Order have taken place; increasing the licence fee from £5 to £12.50, with concessionary rates for those over the age of 65, and those on certain benefits; and increasing the fee for a block licence from £12.50 to £32. These changes came into operation on 3 October 2011. As well as these changes, from 2 April 2012 compulsory microchipping of dogs will commence. From that date when applying for a dog licence, whether for the first time or for a renewal licence, it will be a condition of the licence for the dog to be microchipped.

Single Payment Scheme

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in light of the ruling of the Parliamentary Ombudsman regarding the maladministration of the Single Payment Scheme (SPS) by the Rural Payment Agency, whether she will review her Department's administration of SPS to ensure that claimants are compensated for similar 'innocent mistakes' made as a result of errors not being picked up by her Department.
(AQW 5535/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The recent British Parliamentary Ombudsman's report looked at specific cases and, in particular, at the level of service provided to English farmers in the early years of the Single Payment scheme. The compensation recommended relates to poor customer service in these cases rather than the interpretation of regulatory provisions.

My Department will consider this report, as it relates to specific cases and the level of service provided to these in the early years of the Rural Payment Agency's scheme administration. There are clear provisions within EU regulations to allow correction of obvious errors made by claimants when submitting their claims. These are carefully defined and I have arrangements in place for these to be implemented in cases of obvious error.

Single Farm Payment

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the circumstances in which a farmer could receive a Single Farm Payment for land they did not own, and therefore deprive the land owner of the payment.
(AQW 5549/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: To be eligible to apply for Single Farm payment (SFP) a claimant must satisfy all the scheme conditions as laid down by the EU. A claimant must:

- Be a farmer undertaking agricultural activity (at a minimum, this involves keeping land in good agricultural and environmental condition), ;
- Hold payment entitlements and have eligible agricultural land;
- Ensure that any individual field, or area within a field, declared to activate SFP entitlements is at least 0.1 hectares; and
- Have the land on which payment is claimed at their disposal on 15 May of the year of the claim.

A claimant does not have to own the land to be eligible for SFP, but has to ensure that all of the above conditions are met. In cases where a landowner has leased land or let land in conacre to another farmer, they need to decide who meets the eligibility conditions and agree who will claim SFP on that land.

Farm Produce: Best Price

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what her Department is doing to help farmers achieve the best price for their produce.
(AQW 5648/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The price that farmers receive for their produce is a commercial matter and therefore is not something in which that I can directly intervene. However, I believe that farmers should receive a fair price for the produce that they bring to the marketplace and I would encourage the agri-food sector, as a whole, to follow a market-led strategy to secure the best financial return.

You may be aware that I am working with the DETI Minister to put in a place a Food Strategy Board, whose role will be to develop a longer term strategy for the agri-food sector. This strategy will include challenging growth targets and, as such, its development will be important for planning future growth of the sector.

It is important to help farmers develop strong and profitable relationships with their supply chain partners and my Department proactively facilitates such communication through various supply chain initiatives. This includes support through the Supply Chain Development Programme, funded by the NI Rural Development Programme.

Assistance is also available from CAFRE and AFBI, to help farmers improve their efficiency, competitiveness and innovation and this, in turn, supports efforts to achieve better financial returns in today's competitive marketplace. I would encourage farmers to avail of this assistance in particular through local CAFRE farm advisers and also through agricultural and food technologists based at Greenmount and Loughry Campuses respectively. CAFRE staff can provide bespoke technical support and training to meet farmers' needs and enhance their efficiency and competitiveness.

Bees: Commercial Colonies

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an estimate of the number of commercial bee colonies kept by commercial bee keepers in each of the last five years; and, if no statistics are available, whether her Department is aware of any reduction in the size of the bee population over this period.
(AQW 5688/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Beekeeping in the north of Ireland is typically small-scale and not commercial. There is presently no registration of beekeepers but estimates, from beekeeping associations and DARD's inspectorate, suggest that there are some 1,000 beekeepers managing in the region of 4,000 hives.

The Department is not aware of any reduction in size of the bee population over the period. While, managed honey bee colonies suffer overwintering losses, losses for 2010/11 were 16 per cent, which would be within the expected range.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

2012 Olympics: Training

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many Olympic teams have expressed an interest in training in Northern Ireland before the London 2012 Games.
(AQW 5241/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): To date Sport NI have secured three pre-Games training camps in the run up to the London 2012 Games.

The three teams are the Chinese Artistic Gymnastics team, the Australian Boxing team and the Irish Paralympics Team. Council of Ireland

In addition a number of pre Games events involving International athletes have taken place in the north of Ireland. These are the Boccia World Cup, a 2012 Paralympic qualifying event; a Table Tennis tournament; and the Yonex Irish Badminton Championships, a 2012 Olympic qualifying event.

Sport NI is involved in sensitive negotiations with a number of other countries about pre Games training and qualifying events. This is a highly competitive process and therefore I am unable to detail these Countries or sports.

Shared Future

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) to outline the measures she has taken since coming into office. or plans to take, to promote a shared future; and (ii) whether she will consider implementing a policy appraisal whereby her Department will screen and policy-proof all policies and spending decisions for the impact on good relations and the creation of a shared future.
(AQW 5245/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Under the Northern Ireland Act 1998, all Departments are required to fulfil the statutory duty to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

My Department's remit impacts on the lives of many throughout our community. Sport, arts and creativity and linguistic diversity make a direct and valuable contribution to good relations and the creation of a shared and better future.

The steps taken by my Department to progress the good relations duty during the past year are detailed in our Annual Progress Report 2010/11 to the Equality Commission. The revised Departmental Equality Scheme, approved by the Equality Commission in September 2011, details the actions we are currently taking to promote a shared and better future.

The statutory equality duties require DCAL to consider how all policy development and spending decisions contribute to promoting good relations and this includes the screening of policies as recommended by the Equality Commission.

The approach to mainstreaming good relations considerations into policy development and resource allocation will also be considered as part of the development of the final Cohesion, Sharing and Integration strategy.

DCAL: Information Service

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many staff are employed in her Department's Information Service; and what is the annual cost of this service.
(AQW 5438/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department's Information Service had a total of 6 staff (4 Executive Information Service Officers and 2 Administrative staff) in post during 2010/11.

Pay Bill costs for this financial year amounted to £190,046.56, this includes salary costs, employer costs including superannuation, national insurance and all overtime and allowance costs.

Tourism: Visitor Numbers

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what role her Department has in helping the Department of Enterprise,Trade and Investment to achieve its target of a 20 per cent increase in visitor numbers.
(AQW 5442/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) will play a central role in helping DETI achieve its visitor target.

The department will invest £158.24m capital and £431.19m current funding in the culture, arts and leisure sector in the north of Ireland over the 4 years of the current CSR Period 2011-2015.

A number of key infrastructure projects funded by DCAL have recently been completed in Belfast including the new PRONI building in Titanic Quarter, the new Ulster Museum, the Lyric Theatre, and the Metropolitan Arts Centre is due to open early in 2012. Additionally many regional venues have also been completed.

This investment will make a significant contribution to the cultural infrastructure and cultural product that will enhance the tourism offer available here.

The department is working closely with DETI on the NI 2012 Programme at the heart of which is the Titanic celebrations but includes other projects connected with the 2012 Olympic Games.

DCAL has also committed £6.04m to the World Police and Fire Games, that will take place in 2013, and it is hoped the event will attract in the region of 25,000 visitors to Belfast.

Angling: Licences

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether her Department has any plans to simplify angling licences, such as having a single licence for coarse and game fishing.
(AQW 5460/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The angling licensing regime was established by the Fisheries Act (NI) 1966, as amended, and any changes require the full legislative process to be undertaken.

The current licensing regime recognises that there are distinct types of angling and allows anglers to only pay for that which they practice. However, to accommodate those practising both game and coarse fishing and negating the need for them to purchase two licences, the game licences also cover anglers for coarse fishing.

The Department has also introduced a number of concessionary licences to encourage participation in angling for juveniles, senior citizens and those with disabilities. There are also 3 and 14 day licences available to encourage visitors to fish legally.

While my Department keeps the licensing regime under review, there are no immediate plans to change the current system. Any future changes would be informed by the views of stakeholders.

Angling: Licences

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she plans to have any discussions with the Dublin government to harmonise angling licences across the island of Ireland, particularly to enable angling tourists to fish freely.
(AQW 5461/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have no immediate plans to have any discussions with the Dublin Government on angling licensing.

DCAL officials have had discussions with representatives of the Loughs Agency and Inland Fisheries Ireland on a range of issues of mutual interest, including angling licensing.

It is understood that the Loughs Agency is considering the feasibility of piloting an electronic licensing system within its jurisdiction.

Zebra Mussels

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the impact that the spread of Zebra Mussels is having on navigable waterways; and for her assessment of the response taken to date to tackle the spread of Zebra Mussels on the island of Ireland.
(AQW 5462/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Zebra mussels have had a significant impact on navigation activities in Upper Lough Erne due to extensive aquatic weed growth as a result of increased water clarity stemming from their capacity to filter water. This has resulted in increased maintenance costs for Waterways Ireland.

Waterways Ireland (WI) has introduced a variety of measures to stop/minimise the spread of non native invasive species, including zebra mussels, within the navigable inland waterways in the Island of Ireland such as:

- Targeted and focused bio-security protocols for all maintenance and capital works including cleaning of boats and equipment have been implemented.

- Monitoring and surveillance have been undertaken facilitating surveys on a periodical basis to document and locate potential new infestations (e.g. Survey of Introduced Aquatic Plants within the Shannon River System, 2007 – reports from Lough Derg Science Group).

WI participates in relevant invasive species working groups in order to be kept abreast of the latest information and developments with regard to Zebra mussel management. For example:

- CAISIE (Controlling Aquatic Invasive Species in Ireland - EU Life+ funded project being project managed by IFI with WI a project partner)
- Zebra Mussel Control Group (with NPWS, NIEA, QUB, AFBI NI Water and IFI)
- Invasive Species Ireland (with Loughs Agency, DOENI, DCAL, DARD, An Taisce, Bord Bia, Heritage Council, EPA, OPW, DoE)

WI works in conjunction with relevant statutory agencies to increase and raise awareness with stakeholders and members of the public with regard to Invasive Species. In this regard WI is a member of the Lough Erne Invasive Species Group

Angling: Infringements

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether her Department has considered the introduction of a fixed penalty scheme for angling infringements.
(AQW 5515/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am aware that the Fisheries Conservancy Board, which was responsible for the enforcement of Fisheries legislation until it was abolished on 1 June 2009, gave some consideration to the feasibility of a fixed penalty scheme.

The Board concluded that there were a number of practical difficulties in introducing and operating a fixed penalty scheme in the context of fisheries legislation and decided not to proceed.

Criminal offences related to fisheries were established in the Fisheries Act (NI) 1966, as amended, and if it was considered appropriate, the introduction of a fixed penalty scheme would require a major review of primary legislation.

I consider that the Act still provides a sound foundation for the conservation and protection of fisheries. Major changes to the Act to enable a fixed penalty system would be resource intensive for DCAL and is not currently a priority for the Department.

Lough Erne Game Fishery

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what level of public consultation took place prior to the decision of the Fisheries Conservancy Board to allow parts of the Lough Erne game fishery to become a coarse fishery.
(AQW 5516/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In 2005 the Department re-defined the area on Lower Lough Erne where fishing ground bait and maggots were permitted. This was in recognition of the changing fish ecology in the Lough.

At the time in question the Fisheries Conservancy Board was the representative stakeholder forum for the range of salmon and inland fisheries interests. Prior to the Department making the Regulations it consulted with the Board on the proposals and the Board approved these in March 2004.

Consequently, the Board introduced the Fisheries (Amendment No.2) Byelaws 2004 (S.R. 504) which re-aligned the Lower Lough Erne area on which a coarse fishing licence was valid, with the new ground bait and maggots line. As this amendment was considered a consequential change following on from the already approved new ground bait and maggots line, no further consultation was considered necessary.

Angling: Permits

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of angling permits purchased in each Council area in each of the last ten years.
(AQW 5517/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Records of angling permit sales are not held in a manner that enables the production of a breakdown by each local council area. The table below details total permit sales for each of the last ten years.

Type of Permit	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Game Season	824	1530	1534	1530	1623
Juvenile Season	881	1628	2801	3177	3442
3 Day Game	N/A	N/A	1749	1811	1889
14 Day Game	N/A	N/A	51	40	56
Local Season	892	1405	1108	1180	1222
Coarse Season	997	1258	1080	1038	1091

Type of Permit	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
3 Day Coarse	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
14 Day Coarse	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Concessionary Over 60	N/A	N/A	1331	1563	1816
Concessionary Disabled	436	789	1040	1121	1175
8 Day Permit	56	44	N/A	N/A	N/A
Daily Permit	953	1354	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total Sales	**5039**	**8008**	**10694**	**11460**	**12314**

Type of Permit	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Game Season	1593	1752	1680	1669	1293
Juvenile Season	3148	3581	3410	3622	3161
3 Day Game	1653	2228	2111	2552	2320
14 Day Game	49	37	60	43	51
Local Season	1118	1238	1244	1289	1210
Coarse Season	1195	1175	1199	1280	1221
3 Day Coarse	124	104	150	120	125
14 Day Coarse	21	8	4	7	16
Concessionary Over 60	1901	2103	2286	2582	2605
Concessionary Disabled	1429	1482	1631	1712	1744
8 Day Permit	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Daily Permit	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total Sales	**12231**	**13708**	**13775**	**14876**	**13746**

Emigration

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the work her Department will take to reduce the impact that increasing levels of emigration are having on sporting organisations.
(AQW 5654/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for undertaking work to reduce the impact on sporting organisations of any existing, or potential, increase in levels of emigration rests, in the first instance, with the organisations concerned. However, under the sports strategy, Sport Matters, DCAL is, and will be, working with sports organisations and other stakeholders to help improve the north of Ireland's sporting image at home and abroad by establishing a world class sports system in the north. It is expected that improving the north's sporting image and establishing a world class sports system will help address the impact of any current or future socio-economic change, including levels of emigration, on sporting organisations.

Ulster Canal

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the Ulster Canal project.
(AQO 998/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Waterways Ireland has lodged the project for planning permission in both jurisdictions.

On the 25th of October plans were submitted with Monaghan Co. Council, Clones Town Council and Cavan Co. Council in the South and on the 28th of October with the Department of the Environment (DOE) Planning Service in the North.

Waterways Ireland must await the outcome of this process before proceeding further.

Creative Industries: Professional Arts Sector

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether there is a link between the professional arts sector and developing the long term capacity for the growth of creative industries.
(AQO 999/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The creative and cultural industries are characterized by a diversity of occupations, provision and business models, including publicly subsidized companies and venues supported by the arts funding system; smaller companies accessing project funding; and commercial entities.

The richness, diversity and vibrancy of the arts sector can contribute to many aspects of creative industries including film and television production, digital media and cultural tourism.

Líofa 2015: Universities

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether her Department is working with local universities to promote and achieve the Líofa 2015 campaign objectives.
(AQO 1000/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department has been engaging with local universities since the inception of the Líofa Initiative in September of this year.

Representatives of all universities in the North were invited to the Líofa launch and delegates from the University of Ulster and St Marys Teacher Training College were in attendance on the day.

Furthermore I have been engaged in correspondence with St Marys and Stranmillis Teacher Training College on Líofa.

My Department intends to continue to work with local universities as the Líofa Initiative progresses to promote and achieve the Líofa 2015 campaign objectives.

World Police and Fire Games

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the preparations for the World Police and Fire Games in 2013.
(AQO 1001/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The World Police and Fire Games will be the biggest single sporting event ever hosted in Belfast.

It will attract in the region of 10,000 competitors supported by some 15,000 family and friends from approximately 60 countries.

It is estimated that the economic benefit to the north of Ireland will be £15.5m however this is a conservative estimate as it does not take into account visitors who may return to the north on future occasions.

Additional benefits are that the Games will:

- Impact positively on sport;
- Create a strong image of the north of Ireland internationally;
- Boost tourism;
- Enhance social cohesion;
- Create a legacy effect; and
- Promote the reputation of the police, prison service and fire and rescue services both at home and abroad.

A Company Limited by Guarantee known as 2013 World Police and Fire Games Limited was established by my Department to deliver the Games in 2013. The Company was registered in Companies House on 28 February 2011.

A Chairperson and Board of Directors have been appointed with responsibility for taking forward the delivery of the Games.

Following a competition a Chief Executive for 2013 WPFG Limited was appointed and took up post on the 21 June 2011. Work is underway to develop plans to deliver successful Games.

Professional Arts

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure why the delivery and growth of professional arts was not identified as a specific priority in the draft Programme for Government.
(AQO 1002/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The draft Programme for Government recognises the potential of the arts sector as an instrument for positive change.

Many people make a distinction between different types of art – professional, high art versus community arts. I want all art forms to contribute to improving our society, particularly for those most in need, whether directly through community engagement or indirectly by encouraging excellence. I am committed to supporting the arts to achieve this priority.

Department of Education

Schools: Closures

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Education to detail the savings that were made as a result of school closures between 2009 and 2011.
(AQW 5278/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The table below details the running costs, in their year of closure, of the schools closed between 2009 and 2011. The table excludes the one-off costs arising as a result of the closures such as demolition, security or redundancy costs. This information has been sourced from the Education and Library Boards.

Year	Staffing £'000	Non Staffing £'000	Total £'000
2009/2010	4,229	682	4,911
2010/2011	1,302	236	1,538
2011 to Date	1,141	150	1,291

Schools: Vacant Buildings

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Education whether any of the vacant school buildings or unused land resulting from school closures between 2009 and 2011 have been sold.
(AQW 5279/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As part of the on-going active management of the controlled schools' estate the Education and Library Boards continually look for opportunities to sell surplus assets on the open market.

Surplus land and property are disposed of in line with guidance set out by Land and Property Services, at a price that represents value for the public purse.

There is however relatively limited demand of vacant school premises in the current financial climate, and none of the vacant school buildings or unused land resulting from school closures between 2009 and 2011 (as detailed in the answer to AQW 5277/11-15) has yet been sold.

Schools: Vacant Places

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Education to detail the process for monitoring vacant school places and the triggers for action.
(AQW 5280/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Sustainable Schools Policy (published in 2009), which is the Department's framework for assessing the viability and long term sustainability of schools, sets out a minimum enrolment for primary schools of 105 pupils in rural areas and 140 in urban, and of 500 pupils (exclusive of sixth forms) in post-primary schools. This policy will be the key driver for a move to a more strategic, area based approach to planning of education provision which I have commissioned the Education and Library Boards, working in close conjunction with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and other sectors, to co-ordinate.

Area planning is necessary to develop the effective, sustainable and affordable pattern of sustainable schools needed to provide pupils with a broad and balanced curriculum. It aims to have the right type and size of schools in the right place to meet local needs, and through this process the level of enrolments in schools will be adjusted in line with demand. The existence of vacant places in a school does not of itself trigger any action by the Department. However, vacancies in schools will be a consideration in the area planning process, for example, in assessing existing capacity in an area and comparing with what is needed for the future.

Schools: Ulster-Scots Culture

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what discussions he has had with the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure in relation to the development of the Ulster-Scots culture in schools.
(AQW 5320/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have not as yet met with the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to discuss the development of the Ulster-Scots culture in schools, although I have met the Ministerial Advisory Group on Ulster Scots to discuss relevant matters

Schools: E-schools Project

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the work of the e-Schools Project to date.
(AQW 5347/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The e-Schools data warehouse is a secure online store for student and teacher data collected electronically from a range of sources such as the management information systems of schools and Education and Library Board (ELB) systems.

It provides schools with access to current data to assist them with self-evaluation and school improvement, and supports the ELBs and the Department of Education in their business processes in relation to the delivery of education services. The work carried out by the e-School Project to date has resulted in the delivery of the following:

- Data is automatically extracted on a daily basis and is loaded into the data warehouse each month.
- The data warehouse contains over two years of data which is available to nominated Department of Education and ELB users for reporting and analysis.
- Schools receive Monthly Report Packs and weekly validation reports covering a range of areas including attendance/ absence, enrolment, assessment and examinations.
- Schools can analyse the information provided in these reports, using key indicators which allow them to assess their own performance against similar types of schools.
- ELBs and DE can use analysis tools (40 standard reports) within the data warehouse to support school performance programmes.
- Data is also grouped at regional, ELB and school level.
- Data not held in existing systems can be collected using an online e-form mechanism.

The eSchools Project Team is currently progressing work to use eSchools as a mechanism to distribute monthly teacher absence and substitution information to schools to ensure that schools are more aware of this information on a regular basis. Initial work has also been undertaken with education stakeholders to enhance the analysis capability in relation to school examinations and performance.

Schools: Home to School Transport

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Education to detail the annual cost of administering the Home To School Transport Scheme. **(AQW 5364/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd: I am informed by the Education and Library Boards that their annual cost of administering the operational arrangements of the home to school transport scheme for the last three years is as follows:

Year	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Cost	£1,918,465	£1,849,115	£1,799,899

DE: Construction Work Payments

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education what proportion of invoices for construction work have been paid on time by his Department and its arm's length bodies, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 5376/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education (DE), Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), Staff Commission for Education & Library Boards (SCELB), Youth Council (YCNI), Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG) and the General Teaching Council (GTCNI) have not paid construction invoices in any of the last 3 financial years.

The table below details the percentage of construction invoices paid on time by the Department's other Arms Length Bodies (ALBs) in each of the last three financial years. The Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) have not been responsible for the direct payment of construction invoices since mid 2008.

Organisation	2008/09 %	2009/10 %	2010/11 %
Belfast Education & Library Board	100	98	94
North Eastern Education & Library Board	100	97	98
South Eastern Education & Library Board	83	92	92
Southern Education & Library Board	95	99	99
Western Education & Library Board	73	82	86
Middletown Centre for Autism	100	100	100
NICIE	0	N/A	N/A

DE: Information Service

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education how many staff are employed in his Department's Information Service; and what is the annual cost of this service.
(AQW 5444/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education's Information Service is part of the Communications Team which comprises a total of 13 staff - 5 information officers, 4 administrative staff and a Desktop Publishing Unit comprising 4 graphic design staff. In addition to press and public relations work the Communications Team has responsibility for the Departmental website and intranet, managing webmail queries, updating the NI Direct website, design and print of documents, preparation of ministerial briefings relating to school visits and oversight of internal communications. Salary costs for the 2010/11 year, when there were 14 members of staff, were £387,522.

Gross salary details include gross pay received, and corresponding employer's national insurance contributions and superannuation costs.

Bangor Central Integrated Primary School

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education, in light of the funding allocated to Northern Ireland as part of the Chancellor's Autumn 2011 Statement, whether he will follow up, without delay, on the promises of his predecessor to ensure that Bangor Central Integrated Primary School receives the funding it requires for a new school building.
(AQW 5479/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Neither the Department nor the South Eastern Education and Library Board has agreed funding for a new build for Bangor Central Integrated Primary School.

As I set out in my Statement to the Assembly on Monday 26 September 2011, I have commissioned the five Education and Library Boards, working with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and other sectors, to co-ordinate a strategic area planning process to shape the future pattern of education delivery.

Schools previously identified as needing a new build will be critically assessed alongside all other potential projects as part of the area planning process to determine how they will contribute to the overall infrastructure needed. I recognise that this school, along with others, is facing challenges in terms of accommodation. However until the area planning work is completed, I will not be in a position to comment on a possible new build for any school.

Careers Guidance

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education, in light of the increase in unemployment, whether he intends to offer more tailored careers guidance for children and young people to maximise their employment prospects.
(AQW 5498/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has agreed a joint careers strategy "Preparing for Success" with the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL). As part of the strategy's Implementation Plan, post primary schools are working in partnership with DEL's Careers Service to ensure that the careers education, information, advice and guidance needs of young people are met. This includes providing access to Labour Market Information which takes account of current and future employment trends.

Schools: Vacant Places

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of vacant school places in each primary school in the North Antrim area.
(AQW 5540/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of vacant places in schools is derived from the difference between a school's approved enrolment number and the number of pupils enrolled at the school. According to this calculation, in the 2010-11 academic year - the last year for which enrolment statistics are available - there were 2,738 unfilled places in primary schools in the North Antrim constituency area distributed as follows:-

School	Unfilled Places
Tildarg Primary School	6
Longstone Primary School	31
Carrowreagh Primary School	31
Garryduff Primary School	2
Buick Memorial Primary School	147
Dunseverick Primary School	38

School	Unfilled Places
Kirkinriola Primary School	16
Harryville Primary School	183
Lislagan Primary School	9
Gracehill Primary School	1
Landhead Primary School	2
Eden Primary School	8
Straidbilly Primary School	2
Moorfields Primary School	16
Carnaghts Primary School	17
The Diamond Primary School	6
Clough Primary School	0
Kells and Connor Primary School	28
The Wm Pinkerton Memorial Primary School	95
Bushmills Primary School	138
Ballymena Primary School	57
Kilmoyle Primary School	14
Fourtowns Primary School	45
Knockahollet Primary School	9
Broughshane Primary School	26
Ballykeel Primary School	116
Camphill Primary School	3
Leaney Primary School	32
Armoy Primary School	69
Dunclug Primary School	176
Rasharkin Primary School	104
Carniny Primary School	6
Cloughmills Primary School	110
Portglenone Primary School	88
Hazelbank Primary School	26
Balnamore Primary School	10
Bushvalley Primary School	28
Millquarter Primary School	4
St Marys Primary School	22
St Marys Primary School	23
St Marys Primary School, Glenravel	53
St Olcans Primary School	46
Barnish Primary School	42
Braid Primary School	24

School	Unfilled Places
St Brigid's Primary School	34
St Anne's Primary School	23
Glenravel Primary School	12
St Patrick's Primary School	104
St Brigid's Primary School	136
St Patrick's Primary School	69
St Joseph's Primary School	30
St Patrick's Primary School	111
St Colmcille's Primary School	7
St Brigids Primary School	0
St Pauls Primary School	52
Gaelscoil an Chastil	25
Ballymoney Controlled Integrated Primary School	169
Ballycastle Integrated Primary School	36
Braidside Integrated Primary School	21

Source: NI School Census and School Access Team Data

The figures exclude the enrolments of 198 pupils in receipt of a statement of special educational needs as they are admitted over and above a school's approved enrolment number.

Schools: School Uniform Grants

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of successful applications for a school uniform grant; (ii) the average value of the individual grants awarded; and (iii) the total amount of the grants awarded, in the North Antrim area, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 5541/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested, as provided by the North-Eastern Education and Library Board, is set out below:

	Number of Successful Applications	Average Value of Each Grant	Total Amount of Grants Awarded
2007/08	673	£69.14	£46,533.00
2008/09	880	£70.46	£62,002.00
2009/10	2,551	£51.59	£131,607.00
2010/11	3,034	£52.56	£159,458.25
2011/12 (To Date)	3,546	£51.57	£182,858.50

The figures for 2009/10 onwards include the primary school uniform grant which was introduced by my predecessor in that year, the first time that such a measure had been taken here.

In addition, the eligibility criteria were extended in 2010/11, on a phased basis, to include Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 pupils in primary schools whose parents were in receipt of Working Tax Credit and who had an annual taxable income not exceeding £16,190. Key Stage 2 pupils became eligible under this criterion from September 2011.

Pupils: Free School Meals and Academic Achievement

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail the percentage of pupils who are entitled to free school meals and who achieved five GCSEs at Grade A*-C, including English and Maths, in each of the last three years; and how this figure compares to the grades achieved by those pupils who are not entitled to free school meals.
(AQW 5542/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The answer is in the table below.

Percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C (inc. equivalents) including GCSE English and maths by free school meal entitlement 2007/08 to 2009/10

2007/08		2008/09		2009/10	
Entitled to FSM	Not Entitled to FSM	Entitled to FSM	Not Entitled to FSM	Entitled to FSM	Not Entitled to FSM
27.7%	61.6%	29.7%	63.6%	31.3%	64.3%

Source: School Leavers Survey

Schools: Newbuilds

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what new builds for schools will commence as a result of the additional funding announced in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement.
(AQW 5559/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As I set out in my Statement to the Assembly on Monday 26 September 2011, I have commissioned the five Education and Library Boards, working with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and other sectors, to co-ordinate a strategic area planning process to shape the future pattern of education delivery.

Schools previously identified as needing a new build will be critically assessed alongside all other potential projects as part of the area planning process to determine how they will contribute to the overall infrastructure needed. Potential projects may re-emerge if identified as a priority to support the area plan. I would point out that future capital investment in education will be targeted at supporting area plans.

It is the responsibility of the Executive to decide on the allocation of the additional capital funding arising from the Chancellor's Autumn Statement. I can assure you, however, that I will endeavour to secure a share of this funding for the education sector.

Bangor Central Integrated Primary School

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how he intends to fulfil his predecessor's commitment to a new build for Bangor Central Integrated Primary School; and to detail the timescale.
(AQW 5560/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Neither the Department nor the South Eastern Education and Library Board has agreed funding for a new build for Bangor Central Integrated Primary School.

As I set out in my Statement to the Assembly on Monday 26 September 2011, I have commissioned the five Education and Library Boards, working with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and other sectors, to co-ordinate a strategic area planning process based on Board areas to shape the future pattern of education provision.

Schools previously identified as needing a new build, including that for Bangor Central Integrated Primary School (IPS), will be critically assessed alongside all other potential projects as part of the area planning process to determine how they will contribute to the overall infrastructure needed. I recognise that this school, along with others, is facing challenges in terms of accommodation. However until the area planning work is completed, I will not be in a position to comment on a possible new build for any school.

Schools: Newbuilds

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the implications of the additional funding announced in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement for new builds for schools.
(AQW 5561/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As I set out in my Statement to the Assembly on Monday 26 September 2011, I have commissioned the five Education and Library Boards, working with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and other sectors, to co-ordinate a strategic area planning process to shape the future pattern of education delivery.

Schools previously identified as needing a new build will be critically assessed alongside all other potential projects as part of the area planning process to determine how they will contribute to the overall infrastructure needed. Potential projects may re-emerge if identified as a priority to support the area plan. I would point out that future capital investment in education will be targeted at supporting area plans.

It is the responsibility of the Executive to decide on the allocation of the additional capital funding arising from the Chancellor's Autumn Statement. I can assure you, however, that I will endeavour to secure a share of this funding for the education sector.

Schools: Closures

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the timescale from when a development proposal is recommended by an Education and Library Board for a school closure and a Ministerial decision being taken, including the consultation period.
(AQW 5562/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: When an Education and Library Board publishes a Development Proposal, a statutory 2-month consultation period commences, during which objections and other responses to it can be made directly to my Department. After this period ends, I aim to make a timely decision on each proposal.

Other than this, there is no statutory timetable for any aspect of the Development Proposal process. It is, however, my Department's view that any school authority - Board, CCMS or other - bringing forward a Proposal for publication should do so well in advance of the proposed date of implementation. This is particularly important in the case of a proposed school closure, in order to allow parents, pupils and staff to make transitional arrangements should the proposal be approved.

Pupils: Autistic Spectrum Disorder

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Education to detail the total number of pupils in the (i) controlled; (ii) maintained; (iii) integrated; and (iv) Irish-medium sectors with an autistic spectrum disorder, broken down by each school year group at (a) primary school; and (b) post -primary school.
(AQW 5569/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Pupils in primary schools recorded as having an Autistic Spectrum Disorder, by year group 2010/11

	School Management type				
Year group	**Controlled[1]**	**Maintained[2]**	**Irish Medium[3]**	**Integrated[4]**	**Total**
Nursery	15	#	0	*	31
Reception	0	0	0	0	0
1	93	73	*	#	182
2	118	108	*	#	249
3	129	99	9	25	262
4	96	103	*	#	239
5	118	112	5	34	269
6	129	116	*	#	272
7	144	#	*	35	296
Total	**842**	**740**	**29**	**189**	**1,800**

Pupils in post-primary schools recorded as having an Autistic Spectrum Disorder, by year group 2010/11

	School Management type				
Year group	**Controlled[1]**	**Maintained[2]**	**Irish Medium[3]**	**Integrated[4]**	**Total**
8	96	103	0	74	273
9	102	67	0	67	236
10	82	81	*	#	225
11	80	57	*	#	188
12	79	64	*	#	202
13	15	31	0	22	68
14	8	9	*	#	27
Total	**462**	**412**	**6**	**339**	**1,219**

Source: NI school census

Notes:

1 Figures for controlled schools exclude controlled integrated and controlled Irish medium schools.

2 Figures for maintained schools include Catholic Maintained and Other Maintained schools, but exclude Irish medium Catholic Maintained and Other Maintained schools.

3 Figure for Irish Medium schools include controlled, Catholic Maintained and Other Maintained Irish medium schools. In the primary data this sector. It also contains pupils in Irish medium units in Catholic Maintained primary schools. There are no pupils recorded as having an Autistic Spectrum disorder in Irish medium units in Catholic Maintained post-primary schools.

4 Figures for integrated schools include controlled integrated and grant maintained integrated schools.

5 Autistic Spectrum disorders include those pupils at Stage 1- 5 on the SEN Code of Practice, with needs recorded as Autism or Aspergers.

'*' denotes fewer than 5 pupils

'#' denotes figure greater than or equal to 5, suppressed due to potential identification of individual pupils.

Pupil: Autistic Spectrum Disorder

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Education what services and support his Department provides to pupils with an autistic spectrum disorder.
(AQW 5570/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Responsibility for the provision of services and support for children and young people with an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) rests with the education and library boards.

Although there may be some variation between boards in relation to the specific detail of service support, the following general elements of service delivery apply.

1 Assessment and Diagnosis

Boards' autism services work in partnership with health colleagues in relation to the diagnosis of children and young people through local multi-disciplinary assessment arrangements. This facilitates effective partnership working between education and health practitioners.

2 Training

Boards provide a comprehensive training programme to staff in mainstream schools to build capacity to support children with ASD. Training is delivered in nursery, primary, post-primary and special schools across all key stages. The core content includes:

- knowledge and understanding of the range of ASD conditions;
- awareness of the effects of ASD on teaching and learning; and
- understanding and implementing core strategies on providing for an autism-friendly classroom and school environment, working in partnership with classroom assistants and developing individually targeted social and communication programmes.

In addition, specialist training is provided to teachers and classroom assistants who work directly with children who have ASD. Programmes cover developing social skills, promoting life skills or applying behaviour principles to help with the teaching and management of pupils with ASD in classroom and school settings. Cluster group training is also provided for teachers who work in specialist settings such as autism-specific learning support classes within mainstream schools.

3 Individual Pupil Support

This includes:-

- setting autism-specific targets in individual educational plans;
- planning for children and young people going through significant transitions (e.g. from home to school, from primary to post-primary, from school to further education or the work-place);
- follow up support for pupils or their teachers/assistants or parents to help sustain and monitor progress or revise strategies during periods when the child is experiencing increased difficulties;
- engagement with parents to increase the consistency between school and home in relation to appropriate strategies; and
- support and training for classroom assistants employed in schools to meet the needs of specific pupils.

4 Specialist provision in the primary and post-primary sectors

Although most children and young people access support and provision in mainstream school, more specialist provision can be accessed in autism specific classes attached to mainstream and special schools.

5 Links with other bodies

The Inter-board ASD Service links with the Middletown Centre for Autism in planning and delivery of specialist training to mainstream schools. Inter-board ASD Services also collaborate with Middletown outreach staff to provide intensive support for a small number of children with exceptionally complex difficulties. The Middletown Centre delivers both a Research and Information Service and a Training and Advisory Service . Advice and guidance is delivered to children through support in their home, school and community, direct support in their school placements or through a whole school approach.

Bangor Central Integrated Primary School

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the funding, from both the current budget and the additional funding that was announced in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement, that will be allocated to Bangor Central Integrated Primary School in the 2011-2015 period.
(AQW 5611/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It will be for the Executive to decide on the allocation of the additional funding announced in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement and I will continue to seek a fair and equitable settlement for Education.

With regard to Bangor Central Integrated Primary School; as you will be aware from my Statement to the Assembly on Monday 26 September 2011, I have commissioned the five Education and Library Boards, working with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and other sectors, to co-ordinate a strategic area planning process to shape the future pattern of education delivery.

Until this area planning work is completed, I will not be in a position to comment on a possible new build for any school.

Schools: Viability Audit

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Education when the schools viability audit will be complete and whether he plans to take decisions on school closures in advance of receiving the final report.
(AQO 1008/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have asked for the Viability Audit reports to be submitted to my Department by the Boards by 16 January 2012.

The initial completion date for the audit was the end of December 2011.

My Department issued the Aggregated School Budget (ASB) figures for the next 3 years to all schools in November and I agreed to extend the deadline for completion of the audit to 16 January 2012.

This extension will enable the Boards to include a more accurate assessment of the financial stability of schools following the recent budget adjustments directing more money to the ASB alongside the assessments of quality of provision and enrolment trends.

It is important to remember that the Viability Audit is to identify schools that are under stress in terms of viability now and in the future. It is the start of a process which will largely be taken forward through area planning. However

I have already indicated to this House that the audit will not be used to delay any necessary actions to protect the educational well–being of pupils. I will therefore continue to take decisions on Development Proposals already initiated, including those for school closures in the best interests of pupils.

Schools: Holywood

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Holywood multi-schools new build project which had received departmental approval to proceed.
(AQO 1010/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The multi-schools capital build project for Holywood was announced in 2006.

It included a new school for Priory College, a new primary school for an amalgamated Redburn and Holywood Primary and a new nursery school.

As you are aware, I have commissioned the Boards and CCMS, in consultation with the other sectors, to carry out a strategic area planning process.

The Holywood scheme will be assessed critically as part of this process alongside other potential projects to determine the infrastructure needed to deliver the area plan.

Until this work is completed I cannot comment on any individual project.

Green Travel Programme

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of Education whether schools will be participating in the Green Schools Travel Programme, which is currently active in 43 countries worldwide.
(AQO 1011/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Green Travel Programme shares its aims and objectives with those of the proposed Active Travel and Safer Routes to Schools strategies sponsored by the Department of Regional Development (DRD). The Active Travel strategy will be available for public consultation via the DRD website in the very near future, while the Department of Education has assisted the aims of the Safer Routes to Schools strategy by providing cycle shelters and lockers, signage, bus turnarounds and pedestrian paths and ramps within the school grounds. I therefore have no plans at present to introduce the Programme across schools. It is for individual schools to decide whether to participate in the Programme.

DE: Budget

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of Education what discussions he has had with the Minister of Finance and Personnel about the shortfall in the education budget.
(AQO 1012/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The shortfall in the Department's anticipated resource spending requirements is some £101m / £177m / £214m / £291m across the 4 year Budget 2011-15 period. I continue to have on-going discussions with the Finance Minister about the impact of this shortfall and also the impact that the reduced capital budget has for the delivery of education. The latest meeting was on Tuesday 29 November 2011. I will continue to raise the shortfall in funding both with the Finance Minister and Executive colleagues.

Shared Education: Advisory Group

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Education to detail the terms of reference for the Ministerial Advisory Group on Shared Education.
(AQO 1013/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The terms of reference have not yet been set. The draft Programme for Government includes a commitment for the group to report work recommendations before the end of 2012/13. I will establish the group by 1 April 2012.

Schools: GCSE Grades

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Education how many schools have pupils leaving them without five GCSE A* to C grades.
(AQO 1015/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In 2009/10, out of 215 post-primary schools, 203 had pupils leaving without having achieved five or more GCSEs at A*to C (or equivalent).

When we look at those 203 schools, the proportion of pupils not achieving at this level ranges from less than 10% to, in the case of 18 schools, 70% or more.

When we add in GCSE English and Maths, the total increases to 214 schools; again, the proportion of pupils not achieving at this level ranges from less than 10% to, in the case of 70 schools, 70% or more.

There are many schools in the north of Ireland achieving good outcomes for their pupils; however, we still have too many young people, in schools right across the north, leaving school without the literacy and numeracy skills that are so vital to their futures and to our economy. That is why I am stepping up implementation of the range of policies aimed at raising standards for all our young people.

Early Years (0-6) Strategy

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Education for an update on the development of the Early Years Strategy.
(AQO 1016/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Departmental officials are currently considering the responses to the consultation on the draft Early Years (0-6) Strategy. It is important that the views raised in the responses to the consultation are fully considered before establishing the way forward. Given the level of interest in the consultation it is taking longer than anticipated to examine the almost 2,000 responses received. I intend, however, to publish the Early Years (0-6) Strategy as soon as possible.

We will also need to ensure that the revised Strategy takes account of the commitment in the Programme for Government to ensure that at least one year of pre-school education is available to every family that wants it.

Grammar Schools: Pupils

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education if social background influences whether a pupil attends a grammar school.
(AQO 1017/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A range of statistical data strongly suggests that social and economic background influences the enrolments of post-primary schools.

2010 data showed that, of those pupils who lived in the 10% most deprived wards in the north, 20.4% attended grammar schools. In the 10% least deprived wards, 68.9% of pupils attended grammar schools. 2010 data also shows that whilst children

entitled to Free School Meals represent 7% of the grammar school pupil population, they represent 18% of the total post-primary school population.

Department for Employment and Learning

St Mary's University College

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he will consider imposing sanctions on St Mary's University College, Belfast in light of the under representation of Protestants who are employed there, despite the adoption of an Equal Opportunities Policy 13 years ago.
(AQW 5168/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): I will not be imposing sanctions on St. Mary's University College. I am aware, however, that the situation could be improved and will be encouraging the College to try and achieve such an improvement.

Students: Disadvantaged Backgrounds

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action his Department is taking to help vulnerable students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds.
(AQW 5174/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department addresses this issue through a number of policy initiatives and a range of specific funding mechanisms. My Department provides support to the Further Education Regional Colleges to encourage access to Further Education (FE), by delivering a wide and varied curriculum through their main campuses, and network of community outreach centres.

My Department has also developed and implemented the Learner Access and Engagement Programme. The programme, which is currently being piloted, allows all six FE Colleges to contract with third party organisations for the provision of learner support. This support is being targeted at those 'hard-to-reach' adults, who are economically inactive, and disengaged from the labour market, with few or no qualifications, to encourage them to enrol on, and complete FE courses.

Through the Additional Support Fund, the Department also provides a range of financial support to assist colleges in discharging their responsibilities towards students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

In higher education my Department provides the universities with a widening participation premium for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and a widening access premium for students with disabilities, as well as funding for special projects aimed at increasing participation in higher education by under-represented groups. In academic year 2011/12, my Department has allocated over £2.2m to the various widening participation funding mechanisms in higher education.

My Department provides funding, through Disabled Students Allowances, to help students pay for the extra costs they may incur when studying their higher education course, as a direct result of a disability, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty. The allowances can help with the cost of a non-medical support provider for example a note taker, items of specialist equipment, travel and other course related costs. In the 2009/10 financial year my Department paid approximately £1,592k in Disabled Student Allowance awards.

My Department is in the lead in the development and implementation of a Northern Ireland Regional Integrated Strategy to Widen Participation in Higher Education. Analysis indicates that young people leaving care in Northern Ireland are under-represented in higher education and they, along with students from the lowest socio-economic groups and students with disabilities, will be among the target groups for Departmental interventions.

In addition, two further education colleges, Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC) and North West Regional College (NWRC), and the University of Ulster have attained the Buttle UK Quality Mark for Care Leavers. This has helped enhance the level of support and provision for young people from a care background. My Department encourages the remaining four colleges and Queen's University Belfast to apply for the quality mark.

Colleges: Religious Imbalance

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action his Department is taking to address the religious imbalance in students attending the six Regional Colleges.
(AQW 5175/11-15)

Dr Farry: All six further education colleges are recognised as statutory bodies for the purpose of Section 75 of the 1998 Northern Ireland Act. Consequently, colleges are legally required to seek a range of data from all students enrolling on further education courses, including their community background.

Based upon the statistical information available, participation in all six further education colleges, by religion, is in line with the relevant age cohort from the Northern Ireland Census of population. In 2010/11, of those professional and technical enrolments at the six further education colleges with known religion, 41% were Protestant, 51% Catholic and 8% were of 'Other/ No Religion'. This reflects exactly the backgrounds recorded for the relevant age cohort from the 2001 Census - 41%, 51% and 7% respectively.

On this basis, my Department has no plans to take any action at this time. Notwithstanding this, I remain committed to ensuring that further education remains fully accessible to all, irrespective of background.

Note: Sources for figures are from the Further Education Statistical Record and NI Census of Population (age cohort 5-44 years). Figures may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the qualifying criteria for receiving the Education Maintenance Allowance.
(AQW 5209/11-15)

Dr Farry: I must advise that there are currently two Education Maintenance Allowances payable in Northern Ireland. One is a means-tested Education Maintenance Allowance payable to eligible students of post compulsory school leaving age attending a school or Further Education college. The other is a non means-tested Education Maintenance Allowance payable to participants on Government training programmes.

In order to be eligible to receive the means-tested Education Maintenance Allowance, a student must:

- be aged between 16 to 19 years old (his/her birthday must fall on or between 2 July and 1 July in the relevant academic year);
- be studying full-time at school or a minimum of 15 hours at a Further Education college in Northern Ireland on an eligible course and attending every lesson in conjunction with his/her course. Eligible courses include academic and vocational qualifications up to and including Level 3;
- meet the nationality and residency requirements of the scheme;
- live in a household that has an annual income of £33,590 or less in the current academic year 2011/12; and
- have not already received the maximum allowance for Education Maintenance Allowance of 117 paid weeks.

The non-means tested Education Maintenance Allowance of £40 per week is paid to participants on the Training for Success Programme, including the Programme Led Apprenticeships and a very small number of residual trainees on the Jobskills Programme which was the previous analogous provision. It is paid under the provisions of the Employment and Training Act (NI) 1950.

West Belfast: Spend by the Department for Employment and Learning

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail his Department's, and its arm's-length bodies', spend in the West Belfast constituency in each of the last three years; and the proposed spend for each year until 2015.
(AQW 5226/11-15)

Dr Farry: Details of expenditure by the Department for Employment and Learning and its arm's length bodies, including both national and European money, specifically relating to the West Belfast constituency is below.

Expenditure for each of the last three years is as follows:

2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
£19,302,917	£21,901,080	£26,680,473

Forecast expenditure for the four years to 2014-15, assuming that training programme expenditure will remain broadly the same as in 2011-12 for the years 2012-13 onwards, is:

2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
£27,857,699	£27,704,811	£27,767,578	£26,618,518 excluding European Social Fund (ESF) (note 1)

This expenditure is in relation to: ·

- projects delivered by the ESF until 2013/14;
- expenditure (excluding student finance) at St. Mary's University College;
- Department for Employment and Learning Jobs and Benefits Offices (JBO) ; and
- training programme costs

Note:

(1) The current ESF programme ceases at the end of 2014 and therefore is excluded from the 2014/15 proposed expenditure figures.

In addition to the above there is expenditure on both Steps to Work (StW)/New Deal (ND) programmes and the Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS) that is not specific to a parliamentary constituency. However, we have been able to estimate the expenditure on these programmes that will relate to the West Belfast constituency. This is as follows:

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15sc
StW		£4.38m	£6.70m	£8.46m	£8.00m	n/a new programme likely	n/a new programme likely
LEMIS	£0.55m	£0.55m	£0.50m	£0.40m	£0.40m	£0.40m	£0.40m

There are a number of other areas of expenditure which we are unable to allocate by parliamentary constituency, namely the Educational Guidance Service for Adults, and the Step-Up programme, which are available in a number of West Belfast schools and Further Education college/campus allocations.

St Mary's University College

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether St Mary's University College, Belfast has provided his Department with an assurance statement to confirm that it is complying with all relevant legislation, twice a year in each year since 1998.
(AQW 5228/11-15)

Dr Farry: As autonomous bodies and employers, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are responsible for ensuring that they comply with all relevant legislation.

Prior to financial year 2010/11, all HEIs in Northern Ireland were required to complete, and return, an Annual Assurance Statement to the Permanent Secretary in my Department. This covers a wide range of financial, governance and accountability issues. From financial year 2010/11 the HEIs have been required to submit Assurance Statements twice yearly.

In each return made since 2003/04, the Principal of St Mary's University College has confirmed that internal control was adequate to provide reasonable assurance of compliance with laws and regulations. Returns made by the College before 2003/04 are no longer held by my Department.

Steps to Work

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of referrals made to the Steps to Work Programme in each of the last twelve months.
(AQW 5234/11-15)

Dr Farry: As participants may be referred several times before starting different strands of provision within the Steps to Work programme, it is considered more meaningful to provide the overall numbers of those who have started the Programme.

The numbers starting the Steps to Work programme from 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 (the most recent period for which statistics are available) are:

Month	No of Starts
September 2010	3,258
October 2010	2,014
November 2010	2,504
December 2010	1,473
January 2011	2,312
February 2011	2,470
March 2011	3,759
April 2011	1,826
May 2011	2,400
June 2011	2,109
July 2011	1,643
August 2011	2,404

European Social Fund

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much funding has been drawn down from the European Social Fund in each of the last six years.
(AQW 5269/11-15)

Dr Farry: The table attached at Annex A sets out the draw down of European Social Funding over the past 6 financial years in respect of the following Programmes that fall under the general European Social Fund heading:

- BSP: Building Sustainable Partnership
- Employment
- EQUAL
- Northern Ireland European Social Fund (NIESF)
- Peace I
- Peace II

There have been no draw downs to date from the Commission in the financial year 2011-2012 but the ESF Managing Authority has lodged one claim with the Commission for processing to be followed by additional claims before year end.

ANNEX A

AQW 5269/11-15 - Drawdowns (receipts) from the European Social Fund - 2006/07 to 2011/12

	Financial Years						
Programme	**2006/07**	**2007/08**	**2008/09**	**2009/10**	**2010/11**	**2011/12**	**Total**
BSP	£55,653,362.94	£45,688,974.20	-	-	-	-	£101,342,337.14
Employment	£1,597,561.75	-	-	-	-	-	£1,597,561.75
EQUAL	£1,302,102.55	-	£1,705,485.73	-	£991,829.78	-	£3,999,418.06
NIESF	-	£6,148,016.94	-	£13,946,829.32	£18,433,092.67	-	£38,527938.93 *
Peace I	£3,264,264.59	-	-	-	-	-	£3,264,264.59
Peace II	£31,704,750.43	£2,586,106.16	-	-	-	-	£34,290,856.59
Total	**£93,522,042.26**	**£54,423,097.30**	**£1,705,485.73**	**£13,946,829.32**	**£19,424,922.45**	**-**	**£183,022,377.06**

* Total includes programme advance payments made at the initiative of the European Commission.

St Mary's University College and Stranmillis University College, Belfast

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what are the anticipated costs of the viability audits to assess the long-term sustainability of St Mary's University College, Belfast and Stranmillis University College, Belfast.
(AQW 5287/11-15)

Dr Farry: The actual cost of this work is not known at present. The work is required to be competitively tendered under public procurement rules. This will be done by the Central Procurement Directorate of the Department of Finance and Personnel on behalf of my Department. To give any indication of estimated cost may prejudice the procurement exercise which will seek to obtain best value for money for my Department and the public.

Stranmillis University College, Belfast

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much capital money his Department has allocated to Stranmillis University College, Belfast, in each of the last five financial years.
(AQW 5321/11-15)

Dr Farry: The capital funding the Department provided to Stranmillis University College, Belfast in each of the last five financial years is shown in the table below:

2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	Total
£4,129,608	£444,448	£145,000	£605,519	£150,000	**£5,474,575**

St Mary's University College, Belfast

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much capital money his Department has allocated to St Mary's University College, Belfast, in each of the last five financial years.
(AQW 5322/11-15)

Dr Farry: The capital funding the Department provided to St Mary's University College, Belfast in each of the last five financial years is shown in the table below:

2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	Total
£157,847	£49,774	£145,000	£499,999	£148,243	**£1,000,863**

Further and Higher Education: Newbuilds

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what are his Department's capital budget commitments in relation to new builds for further education colleges and higher education institutes in each of the next three financial years.
(AQW 5325/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department has a capital budget allocation for the three years from 2012-13 of £79.1m, of which £75.8m is relevant to the further and higher education sectors.

Further education has a capital allocation of £26.3m for the next three financial years. £18.3m of this is committed to projects already delivered or underway in Belfast Metropolitan College – at Titanic Quarter and Springvale. The remaining £8m has not been allocated at this stage, but is intended to address minor works and statutory compliance issues within colleges. Colleges will be asked to bid for this funding in due course.

Higher education has a capital allocation of £49.5m for the next three years. At the commencement of each budget review period, the Department informs the Northern Ireland higher education institutions of the capital budget that is being made available to them. These institutions are invited to submit projects to be considered for this funding.

St Mary's University College and Stranmillis University College, Belfast

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the funding awarded to (i) St Mary's University College, Belfast and; (ii) Stranmillis University College, Belfast in each of the last three years, including the amount awarded in each instance and stated use of the funding.
(AQW 5334/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department allocates funding to the University Colleges to support three main streams of activity; these are learning and teaching and capital activities at both University Colleges, and research at Stranmillis. Capital funding is allocated on a financial year basis (April to March), whereas the other two funding streams are allocated on an academic year basis (August to July). The amount allocated to each College, by funding stream, in each of the last three years is shown in the tables below:

Stranmillis	**2009/10 £'000**	**2010/11 £'000**	**2011/12 £'000**	**Total £'000**
Learning and Teaching Funding	5,753	5,645	5,282	16,680
Research Funding	60	65	63	188
Capital Funding	145	606	150	901
Total	**5,958**	**6,316**	**5,495**	**17,769**

St Mary's	**2009/10 £'000**	**2010/11 £'000**	**2011/12 £'000**	**Total £'000**
Learning and Teaching Funding	5,613	5,514	5,202	16,329
Research Funding	0	0	0	0
Capital Funding	145	500	148	793
Total	**5,758**	**6,014**	**5,351**	**17,122**

Shared Future

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) to outline the measures he has taken since coming into office. or plans to take, to promote a shared future; and (ii) whether he will consider implementing a policy appraisal whereby his

Department will screen and policy-proof all policies and spending decisions for impact on good relations and the creation of a shared future.
(AQW 5362/11-15)

Dr Farry:

(i) I am strongly committed to the creation of a shared and integrated society in Northern Ireland. Every Minister has a duty to promote a shared future, both individually and through collective action by the Executive. To that end, since coming into office, as detailed in my statement to the Assembly on 28th November 2011, a key action has been the launch of a far–reaching study of teacher training provision in Northern Ireland. The first part of the study will carry out an objective analysis of the financial stability and sustainability of the two university colleges. The second strand of the study will set out options for a more shared and integrated system for the delivery and funding of teacher education.

The education of our children and young people is fundamental to how our society functions. If we are to achieve a shared, inclusive future then much of that work must take place in schools so that sharing rather than separation becomes the norm. Critical to the development of a fully integrated education system are the views of others, particularly stakeholders. I will therefore remain open to all reasonable suggestions and recommendations to ensure success in this area.

(ii) Officials within my Department are currently working on the development of a policy tool which will be broader than the current good relations aspect of equality proofing, with a view to creating a form of shared future policy proofing. In addition to current forms of policy proofing, it is intended that this mechanism will be applied to future Departmental policies to assess whether they contribute positively to a shared society or inadvertently reinforce divisions or provide services on a segregated basis.

I intend that policies that tend towards separation will be avoided, while those that are neutral or positively advance a shared future will be favoured. I believe that these proposed innovations represent a groundbreaking development in and improvement to the policymaking process, and will demonstrate a solid commitment to a shared future by my Department.

Higher Education: Funding

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, given the unsustainability and unpopularity of the tuition fees model for funding higher education and the expense required for its administration, what consideration he has given to alternative university funding mechanisms, such as a Business Education Tax as proposed by the University and College Union; and for his assessment of whether the potential for the devolution of the necessary taxation powers to facilitate such an alternative arrangement exists.
(AQW 5506/11-15)

Dr Farry: I am satisfied that the current settlement for higher education and students is fair and sustainable and I have not therefore considered funding mechanisms such as a Business Education Tax. Such taxation powers are not a devolved matter.

Air Travel: Cost

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the total cost incurred by his Department on air travel (i) between Northern Ireland and Heathrow Airport from January to December 2010; and (ii) between Northern Ireland and all airports in Great Britain, excluding Heathrow Airport, from January to December 2010.
(AQW 5578/11-15)

Dr Farry:

Heathrow	All airports in Great Britain excluding Heathrow
£6,507	£42,227

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Enterprise NI: Performance

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of Enterprise NI's performance against its Key Performance Indicators over the last five years.
(AQW 4968/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): In the last five years Enterprise Northern Ireland has delivered contracts for Invest NI in respect of both the Start a Business Programme (SABP), the Enterprise Development Programme (EDP) and the Social Entrepreneurship Programme (SEP).

ENI performance against the key performance indicators within these contracts has been satisfactory in the main although specific issues arose both in the SABP in 2006 and in the delivery of EDP within the contract period April 2009 – end September 2011.

Some key targets in EDP fell significantly short of the targets, most notably those relating to the Growth Pipeline (i.e. identifying and supporting those businesses that had the prospect of being pulled through to growth businesses supported by Invest NI).

Enterprise NI: Governance Arrangements

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether any concerns existed in her Department regarding the governance arrangements within Enterprise NI over the last three years.
(AQW 4969/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment (DETI), with Invest NI, commissions an ongoing review of Third Party Organisations (TPOs) and External Delivery Organisations (EDOs).

An EDO Assurance report on Enterprise NI was received from DETI Internal Audit in February 2010. The report contained a limited opinion in respect of the control environment at ENI. Significant issues noted included weaknesses in corporate governance structures, limited segregation of duties in respect of financial transactions and limited procedures in place to address the risks associated with information security.

ENI accepted the issues noted and agreed an action plan for remedial action. Invest NI undertook an oversight role in relation to the implementation of the recommendations and reported progress to DETI in quarterly assurance reports until the implementation of recommendations was complete. This was completed in June 2011 with a final progress report to the Departmental Audit Committee.

A follow up review was underway but has been halted pending the outcome of the legal process.

It should be noted that the EDO Assurance report relating to ENI considered the risk of these issues leading to a failure to use programme funds in accordance with the purpose intended by the Northern Ireland Assembly. The report noted that this risk was mitigated by the fact that all programme funds received by ENI are subject to a monitoring and vouching programme, before being disbursed.

Foreign Direct Investment

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what progress has been made on inward investment and job creation projects from (i) North America; (ii) South-East Asia; and (iii) the European Union.
(AQW 4976/11-15)

Mrs Foster: North America and Europe are key markets for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Invest NI's strategic focus in these markets has enabled it to exceed its key performance indicators across the three year Programme for Government (FY2008-09 to FY 2010-11).

During this timeframe Invest NI secured 120 employment-related FDI projects from North America and Europe, promoting 7,218 new jobs and safeguarding 1,271 jobs with planned investment of almost £1.1 billion.

In terms of FDI Business Development (i.e. assistance towards innovation & business improvement with no direct employment consequential), Invest NI issued 502 offers with planned investment of £190 million.

FDI levels from South East Asia into Northern Ireland have been historically low. However, Invest NI continually revaluates its strategic focus in order to take advantage of emerging opportunities. Invest NI recently reviewed its presence in Asia and has established a part time FDI representative in China. While not part of the South East Asian region – the presence in China will maintain a watching brief to take advantage of any FDI opportunities in the greater Asian region.

i) The table below details the number of Employment Related & Business Development projects, jobs promoted and safeguarded from the regions of Europe, North America and South-East Asia in the three year period from 2008-09 to 2010-11.

	Employment-Related				Business Development	
Region	**Offers**	**New Jobs**	**Safe Jobs**	**Planned Investment £m**	**Offers**	**Planned Investment £m**
North America	36	3,208	4	735.50	161	115.02
EU	84	4,010	1,267	354.42	341	75.33
South-East Asia	0	0	0	0.00	0	0.00
Total	**120**	**7,218**	**1,271**	**1,089.92**	**502**	**190.35**

ii) The table below details the total number of projects (Employment Related & Business Development), jobs promoted and safeguarded from the regions of Europe, North America and South-East Asia in the three year period from 2008-09 to 2010-11.

Region	Employment Related & Business Development Totals				
	Offers	New Jobs	Safe Jobs	Assistance Offered £m	Planned Investment £m
North America	197	3,208	4	93.36	850.52
EU	425	4,010	1,267	72.41	429.75
South-East Asia	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
Total	**622**	**7,218**	**1,271**	**165.77**	**1,280.27**

Notes:

1 Planned investment includes assistance offered.

2 New Jobs represent the number of jobs expected to be created by the project.

3 Safe Jobs represent the number jobs that would have been lost if the project was not supported.

4 Business development/ improvement and innovation activities will underpin business competitiveness leading eventually to growth and employment opportunities.

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given the controversy surrounding the process of hydraulic fracturing, the strong impacts of the process in specific geographic regions and the potential for burden shifting, why she will not require a full life cycle analysis of the costs and benefits of hydraulic fracturing.
(AQW 5109/11-15)

Mrs Foster: It would be unrealistic to attempt a full life cycle analysis of the costs and benefits of shale gas production at a stage when so many of the input variables cannot be accurately estimated – i.e. before a detailed methodology for any drilling and hydraulic fracturing has been described as part of a drilling application. As I have made clear on many occasions, a full Environmental Impact Assessment will also be undertaken at that stage.

Jobs Promotion

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what measures her Department takes to 'promote' jobs.
(AQW 5110/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department, through Invest NI, intends to undertake a wide range of measures to meet its Programme for Government commitments and promote over 25,000 new jobs across Northern Ireland by March 2015.

This will be achieved by winning new inward investments and helping our existing foreign-owned businesses to expand and develop further. We will also focus on the development of the local indigenous business base, encouraging new business starts and by helping our existing locally-owned companies to grow to the scale required for them to compete in international markets. In addition to these measures, the newly announced Jobs Fund will also promote over 6,000 new jobs which will contribute directly to the necessary rebuilding of our economy following the impact of the economic downturn.

In addition to the above, the wide range of support and assistance available in other key areas such as innovation, research and development, creativity and skills and employability are also likely to have an indirect but positive impact on job promotion over the next three and a half years.

Programme for Government

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what was the outcome of the pledge in the last Programme for Government that at least 75 percent of new jobs would attract salaries above the private sector average.
(AQW 5118/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In the last Programme for Government, Invest NI targeted the promotion of 6,500 new jobs through inward investment projects, with at least 5,500 (75%) attracting salaries above the Northern Ireland Private Sector Median. Final results show that Invest NI has promoted 5,609 new jobs with salaries above the NI Median, and therefore exceeded the target.

Foreign Direct Investment: Derry

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how InvestNI plans to increase Foreign Direct Investment in Derry.
(AQW 5185/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI works closely with councils and other stakeholders to review the features and benefits of each local area in order to maximise opportunities for economic growth.

For example, as part of Invest NI's 2011 International Sales and Marketing conference, staff from all of Invest NI's overseas offices attended a two day conference in Londonderry. They met with local stakeholders and listened to several presentations from Derry City Council, Ilex Regeneration programme and C-TRIC.

In November 2011, Invest NI's London office hosted a dinner event for Derry City Council, targeted at the Shared Services Sector. At this event, funded by Invest NI, the Mayor of the City of Londonderry, representatives from the Economic Development team at the City Council and representatives from the business community met with guests who are looking for a new location for a shared services centre. Invest NI are supporting all follow up activities.

It should be noted that Invest NI sells Northern Ireland as a region capable of meeting the needs of a potential inward investor. It competes for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in a crowded marketplace and its competitors are generally larger country-states (e.g. Republic of Ireland, Scotland, France, etc). Competing at a sub-regional level would be challenging and this approach would potentially dilute the Northern Ireland proposition.

This is not to say that my Department, including Invest NI, is unaware of the challenges facing local areas in Northern Ireland and we will continue to work with local stakeholders to maximise economic growth for all areas.

Tourism Ireland

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans Tourism Ireland has to promote and market Northern Ireland in (i) Russia; (ii) Portugal; (iii) Luxembourg; (iv) Azerbaijan; and (v) Israel during the 2014 FIFA World Cup qualification campaign which begins on 7 September 2012.
(AQW 5203/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Tourism Ireland will maximise the marketing opportunities around Northern Ireland matches which take place in, or involve teams from, key markets for inbound tourism. The scale of the marketing activity around the 2014 FIFA World Cup qualifiers will depend on the location of the match and availability of access links to Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Potential activity could include leveraging media attendance at, and coverage of, the Northern Ireland leg of the matches as well as inviting sports and travel media to enjoy wider familiarisation tours of Northern Ireland.

Youth Enterprise

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department is taking to encourage more young people to become entrepreneurs; and how much funding her Department has provided over the last five years to encourage young people to take this career path.
(AQW 5204/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI has developed a wide range of initiatives to assist people of all ages, including those currently out of work, to start their own business or find new employment.

A number of Invest NI programmes are targeted specifically at young people. The Youth Enterprise Programme for example, currently delivered by Advantage, provides tailored, enhanced enterprise support for 16-24 year olds. The core focus of the programme is to encourage and support young people to think about and to act on business start-up and business development opportunities. Key targets for the programme are to provide business capability support to 1,000 young people, to approve 350 business plans and to identify 30 young entrepreneurs with real growth potential by November 2011. The programme provides a route to market for Invest NI to outreach to young people throughout Northern Ireland with regards to enterprise, and includes on-line and 'youth friendly' support. There is a positive association between enterprise training and new business start-ups with evidence from previous programme evaluations to suggest that specific support to young entrepreneurs is helping to deliver 'additional' business start ups into the Northern Ireland marketplace.

Further support for youth enterprise is being provided through the recently developed Jobs Fund. The Jobs Fund is a £18.8m package of temporary measures specifically created to boost employment and improve employability and will promote 5,000 jobs by 2015 with 4,000 jobs to be created by end March 2014. Building on the existing support to young people who are thinking about starting a business, a specific measure has been developed within the Jobs Fund which provides a £1,500 incentive grant to young people not in Employment Education or Training (NEET) who complete a business plan with support from Invest NI and other stakeholders and take the new business forward.

Invest NI is also focused on fostering and promoting innovation and entrepreneurship in universities and colleges. Along with Enterprise Ireland, Invest NI co sponsors the 'Think Outside the Box Awards'. These awards help to stimulate ideas in enterprise amongst third level education students across the Island of Ireland and to provide capability support to those students in the business planning process.

As part of Global Entrepreneurship Week Invest NI organised an Enterprise Zone Event targeting young people aged 11-13. Pupils took a journey through 5 zones in the business planning process, starting with ideas generation through to financial planning and marketing. The purpose of the event is to introduce pupils to the idea of entrepreneurship and enterprise at a very young age and to show that self-employment is a viable career option. Over 900 pupils from 40 schools attended the event.

Invest has spent £4,085,099 over the last five years in the provision of enterprise awareness to young people.

Tourism Ireland

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans Tourism Ireland and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board have to promote Northern Ireland in (i) Russia; (ii) Portugal; (iii) Luxembourg; (iv) Azerbaijan; and (v) Israel during the 2014 FIFA World Cup qualification campaign which begins in September 2012.
(AQW 5212/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Tourism Ireland will maximise the marketing opportunities around Northern Ireland matches which take place in, or involve teams from, key markets for inbound tourism. The scale of the marketing activity around the 2014 FIFA World Cup qualifiers will depend on the location of the match and availability of access links to Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Potential activity could include leveraging media attendance at, and coverage of, the Northern Ireland leg of the matches as well as inviting sports and travel media to enjoy wider familiarisation tours of Northern Ireland.

NITB does not have responsibility for the promotion and marketing of Northern Ireland overseas.

Shared Future

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) to outline the measures she has taken since coming into office. or plans to take, to promote a shared future; and (ii) whether she will consider implementing a policy appraisal whereby her Department will screen and policy-proof all policies and spending decisions for the impact on good relations and the creation of a shared future.
(AQW 5215/11-15)

Mrs Foster: DETI is fully committed to A Shared Future – the Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in NI. Since coming into office my Department has taken various measures to promote a shared future such as action to encourage ethnic minority enterprise and sponsorship of the Business in the Community Diversity Award. I will continue to ensure that the need to promote good relations is taken into account in the roll out of all departmental policies and programmes.

Consideration of good relations is central to DETI's Equality Scheme. We have screened and proofed all of our policies and spending decisions during the period when a shared future has been in place.

West Belfast: Spend by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail her Department's, and its arm's-length bodies', including InvestNI, spend in the West Belfast constituency in each of the last three years; and the proposed spend for each year until 2015.
(AQW 5233/11-15)

Mrs Foster: It is not possible to disaggregate all expenditure, actual or planned, by the Department and its arm length bodies to individual parliamentary constituencies or other administrative geographic areas.

(i) Departmental Spend

Between April 2008 and March 2011 the Department has invested some £30milliion on telecom projects that cover all of Northern Ireland including West Belfast.

(ii) NITB

2009/2010
- Tourism Investment Fund - £22,395

2010/2011
- Capital development grant - £300,000

2011-2012
- NITB Events Fund - £88,000

2012-2015
- One £15,000 capital development grant for a project which is part of Belfast City Council's Titanic Signage project.

(iii) Invest NI

2009/2010
- £3.228m

This is made up of: -

- Grants £2.929m
- Supplies of goods and services £0.299m

2010/2011

- £3.226m

This is made up of: -

- Grants £3.086m
- Supplies of goods and services £0.14m

Proposed Spend 2011-2015

- £2.473m

The proposed spend relates to the forecast drawdown on existing committed projects, and on new projects that are currently being assessed for assistance.

The forecast does not include expenditure on small value goods and services.

DETI: Public Confidence

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of whether there is a need to restore public confidence in her Department following the information that has come to light that she did not declare that her husband owns a farm holding within one of two focus areas earmarked for shale gas exploration in County Fermanagh, within the Petroleum License PL2/10.
(AQW 5236/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There has been no loss in public confidence with my Department.

Mutual Energy

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the status of the approved 15 million euro investment by Mutual Energy in the European Renewable Energy Fund.
(AQW 5249/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Mutual Energy is a private company and, as such, the information requested is not held by DETI.

Mutual Energy

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the 15 million euro capital investment by Mutual Energy to the European Renewable Energy Fund, along with any profits generated from the investment, will be returned to customers by way of lower energy bills; and if so, when this will take effect.
(AQW 5250/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Mutual Energy is a private company and, as such, the information requested is not held by DETI.

Mutual Energy

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what return has been generated from Mutual Energy's 15 million euro investment in the European Renewable Energy Fund.
(AQW 5251/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Mutual Energy is a private company and, as such, the information requested is not held by DETI.

Mutual Energy

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given that Mutual Energy is involved in the initial phases of a natural gas storage project near Larne Lough' and that it is underwritten by energy customers through the mutual model, what measures and controls are in place to ensure that the company is not exposed to the costs or risks of the natural gas storage start-up project.
(AQW 5252/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Energy consumers' obligations to Mutual Energy are enshrined in transmission licences granted under Northern Ireland energy legislation and issued to Mutual Energy's subsidiary companies, Moyle Interconnector Limited, Premier Transmission Limited and Belfast Gas Transmission Limited. The various licences include measures and controls that restrict the costs and risks of the licence holder. Express regulatory approval and agreement is required for anything beyond the scope of the licences in these companies.

Tourist Board: Events Fund

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the funding that has been awarded to organisations in each district council area from the Tourist Board's events fund since it was established.
(AQW 5266/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Northern Ireland Tourist Board's first Tourism Events Fund launched in February 2011 and operates as an open call. For 2011-12 financial assistance was granted to event organisers in each of the following council areas:

NI Council Area	Funding Awarded	No. of EventsFunded
Antrim	£13,000	1
Armagh	£12,000	2
Belfast	£899,000	23
Coleraine	£71,000	2
Cookstown	£20,000	1
Craigavon	£6,000	1
Londonderry	£40,000	2
Down	£38,000	2
Fermanagh	£35,000	1
Larne	£35,000	1
Lisburn	£103,000	4
Magherafelt	£20,000	1
Moyle	£15,000	1
Newtownabbey	£10,000	1
Omagh	£30,000	2
NI wide (3 events that take place across Northern Ireland in more than 1 council area)	£34,000	3

Sustainable Energy

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the role of the Sustainable Energy Interdepartmental Working Group; and whether it plans to take forward recommendations for the establishment of a single energy department.
(AQW 5283/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Sustainable Energy Inter-departmental Working Group (SE IDWG) was agreed by the Executive in December 2008, primarily to ensure a co-ordinated approach across Government to sustainable energy. In February 2011, the Executive agreed a number of recommendations from SE IDWG including consideration of the consolidation of energy vires to reduce fragmentation of responsibility for sustainable energy issues across departments.

My Department has completed a cost benefit analysis on options for bringing together energy vires and functions. The analysis will be considered by the SE IDWG on 9 January 2012 and options include the establishment of a single energy department.

Invest NI: Investment in Omagh and Strabane

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of potential investors that InvestNI has encouraged and facilitated to visit the (i) Omagh; and (ii) Strabane areas in each of the last four years; and to detail the number of jobs created as a result.
(AQW 5291/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Foreign Direct investment (FDI) plays a large part in the economic growth of Northern Ireland and Invest NI has a very successful track record of attracting high quality investment which will benefit the whole of the region. Invest NI is building on this success by working closely with local stakeholders to maximise investment and employment opportunities in all areas.

It is not possible to align individual visits with specific employment related FDI projects. A company may visit a number of times before making the decision to invest, in which case it could be said that each visit has resulted in job promotion. On the other hand, a company may visit once, make an initial investment and then follow this up with further investment. In this case the one visit would have resulted in more than one investment project.

Table 1 shows that in the last four financial years, 2007-08 to 2010-11, Invest Northern Ireland hosted (i) 3 FDI inward visits to the Omagh District Council Area (DCA) and (ii) none to the Strabane DCA.

Table 2 shows that in the same period, Invest NI promoted 445 new jobs in total across the Omagh and Strabane DCAs, 191 of which were promoted by externally owned clients.

Securing an inward investment may span a considerable period, 18 to 24 months, and is the result of many factors which may, or may not, include visits to different locations. There is often a further time lag between securing an investment and jobs ultimately being created. It should be noted that the number of jobs promoted in Table 2 includes all jobs promoted by Invest NI. This includes both new and repeat indigenous investors, new inward investors and reinvestments by existing inward investors. It is therefore not possible to directly link the number of visits in Table 1 to the number of jobs in Table 2.

Table 1: FDI inward visits (Credible1) in Omagh & Strabane DCA (2007-08 to 2010-11)

	Financial Year				
DCA	**2007-08**	**2008-09[2]**	**2009-10**	**2010-11**	**Total**
Omagh	1	2	0	0	**3**
Strabane	0	0	0	0	**0**
Total	**1**	**2**	**0**	**0**	**3**

Notes:

1) A credible visit is defined as one where Invest NI can claim to have promoted a DCA or PCA by bringing a potential inward investor, who has an identifiable project proposal, to that area.

2) Includes visits as a result of the USNI Conference in May 2008.

3) In addition to the above listed visits, Invest NI has also facilitated a number of visits by other organisations e.g. influencers, overseas governments and trade bodies, which serve to strengthen FDI & Trade links in overseas markets.

Table 2: All new jobs promoted in Omagh & Strabane DCA (2007-08 to 2010-11)

	Financial Year				
DCA	**2007-08**	**2008-09**	**2009-10**	**2010-11**	**Total**
Omagh	134	36	35	61	**266**
Strabane	65	35	71	9	**179**
Total	**199**	**71**	**106**	**70**	**445**

Notes:

1) New jobs promoted are those jobs that are expected to be created by the project. .

2) Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

Fuel Prices

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department intends to take to regulate fuel prices to address the increasing price of fuel which is placing a strain on households.
(AQW 5293/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Office of Fair Trading study of the off-grid energy market showed that the UK market is competitive and retail heating oil prices are lower in Northern Ireland than other parts of the UK. It concluded that regulation is unlikely to have a significant impact on overall fuel prices. Taxes on fuel and retail prices, which respond to fluctuating international wholesale prices, are outside the control of my Department.

Internet Speed

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of (i) business premises; (ii) all public premises, such as schools and libraries; and (iii) domestic properties in each district council area that cannot connect to the internet at a speed greater than 2 mbps using a fixed line telephony service.
(AQW 5342/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The detailed information requested is not available. However a research report produced by Ofcom, the independent telecommunications regulator, in August 2011 ('Communications Infrastructure Report 2011'), estimates that 25.7% of premises in Northern Ireland are unable to get a 2Mbps service using fixed line. This report does not distinguish between households, business consumers or public premises and omits the significant investment made by DETI and BT in Fibre to the Cabinet technology. It does though provide information at council level and is available on Ofcom's website.

Internet services are provided via a range of technologies in addition to fixed line telephone wires including wireless, mobile and satellite technologies. Currently all premises can get services greater that 2Mbps if they wish.

Work commissioned by my Department estimates that some 80,000-100,000 premises are currently unable to 2Mbps service delivered via fixed line, radio or mobile broadband technologies and the range, as a percentage of properties in each council area, is shown below:

Council Area	From	To
Antrim	10%	16%
Ards	5%	9%
Armagh	21%	34%
Ballymena	15%	21%
Ballymoney	16%	25%
Banbridge	15%	25%
Belfast	0%	0%
Carrickfergus	1%	2%
Castlereagh	0%	1%
Coleraine	8%	12%
Cookstown	28%	41%
Craigavon	2%	4%
Londonderry	2%	3%
Down	20%	28%
Dungannon	20%	32%
Fermanagh	29%	42%
Larne	7%	11%
Limavady	13%	19%
Lisburn	2%	6%
Magherafelt	27%	40%
Moyle	12%	20%
Newry and Mourne	18%	28%
Newtownabbey	0%	1%
North Down	0%	0%
Omagh	36%	47%
Strabane	22%	29%

Further work has commenced to refine this information further. This work is scheduled to be completed in 2012.

Telecommunications Trials: Ballinamallard and Ballintoy

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what has been learnt from the telecommunications trials carried out in Ballinamallard and Ballintoy.
(AQW 5343/11-15)

Mrs Foster: This trial was conducted under the £1.9m Broadband Fund and examined if backhaul via satellite could be used to deliver reliable, mobile voice and data services in rural areas un-served by mobile infrastructure.

The trials showed that satellite provides a sufficiently robust platform for delivery of mobile services. Successful results were noted for voice calling (including an industry-accepted level of delay known as latency), internet browsing using mobile handsets, video streaming (eg Youtube), e-mail and messaging services.

Post-trial Avanti has continued its discussions with the mobile industry to examine opportunities for collaboration in delivery of wide-scale trials and commercialisation of services.

Telecommunications: Infrastructure

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what work is being carried out by her Department, with the Department of Communications Energy and National Resources, and other cross-border bodies, to improve telecommunications infrastructure in rural border areas.
(AQW 5344/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department is currently not involved in work with any cross-border bodies to improve telecommunications infrastructure in rural border areas, but continues to work in partnership with the ROI's Department of Communications, Energy and National Resources to monitor Hibernia Atlantic's performance against its obligations under the Project Kelvin contract.

In addition, last week I met with the promoters of a proposed cross-border telecommunications infrastructure project, recently rejected by the Special EU Programmes Body, to consider how any revised proposal could provide enhanced benefits to Northern Ireland.

Broadband

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the average download speed for customers connecting via satellite broadband; and (ii) the average monthly charge for satellite broadband under the Broadband Fund.
(AQW 5345/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The information requested with regard to the average download speed for customers connecting to the internet via satellite broadband technology is not available. DETI does not gather such information and, while the telecommunications regulator, Ofcom, produces reports on broadband speeds across the UK, these are based on access via fixed-line technologies and do not include services delivered using satellite, wireless or mobile technologies.

As I have advised in response to previous Assembly Questions, my Department has a contract in place with Avanti Communications under which satellite broadband services are available to all premises across Northern Ireland where, due to distance of premises from the telephone exchange, a fixed-line service is not currently economically or technically viable.

Through this contract, which is not supported through the Broadband Fund but is funded under DETI's main provisions, Avanti is offering six specific products (four residential and two business) providing broadband services with headline download speeds of between 512Kbps and 3Mbps. The prices for these products are fixed and details can be found at www.avantiplc.com/products/consumers/northern-ireland-broadband.

DETI: Information Service

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the current (i) number; and (ii) annual cost of staff employed in her Department's Information Service.
(AQW 5350/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There are 5 information officers and 2 administrative staff working in Departments information service.

The total cost for staff in 2010/11 was £251,845.

DETI: Construction Work Payments

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what proportion of invoices for construction work have been paid on time by her Department and its arm's length bodies, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 5378/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The table below gives the proportion of invoices for construction work paid on time for each of the last three years.

Body	2011/12 (8 months)	2010/11	2009/10
DETI*	N/A	N/A	N/A
Invest NI	98%	96%	92%
NITB*	N/A	97%	N/A
CCNI*	N/A	95%	94%
HSENI*	N/A	N/A	N/A

*N/A – the body did not pay any construction related invoices in the year.

Rugby World Cup

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, following the positive statement from the Irish Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport Leo Varadkar, whether she will meet with Irish Rugby Football Union officials to discuss the potential for the Rugby World Cup to be held in the island of Ireland in 2023; and whether she will work to support games taking place here.
(AQW 5707/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I welcome the statement of interest from the Republic of Ireland's Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport in bidding for the 2023 Rugby World Cup.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board is currently developing a Tourism Events Plan for Northern Ireland that will identify opportunities to bid for major events in partnership with other host countries and organisations. Consideration will be given in due course to the most appropriate event opportunities that will deliver a lasting legacy for Northern Ireland, with Tourism Ireland providing worldwide promotion of these opportunities.

Department of the Environment

DOE: Staff Education

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the number of staff in his Department who have undertaken a third level education course paid for (a) in whole; or (b) in part by his Department in each of the last three years; (ii) the (a) titles; (b) fees or costs of the courses of study undertaken; (iii) if the course was full-time or part-time; and (iv) the educational institute which provided the course.
(AQW 3758/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): Details of the number of staff who have undertaken a third level education funded in part or in total by the Department in each of the last three years are enclosed in the attached table.

2008/09 AQW 3758/11-15 Response Template

Qualification	Course Title	Full/Part Time	Fully Funded/ Partially Funded	Total Costs Paid by DOE	Institution	No. of Staff
BTEC (Business & Technology Education Council)	Countryside and Fisheries Management	Part Time	Full	£350.00	North West Regional College	1
CIPFA Diploma (Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy)	Level 2 Professional Qualification	Part Time	Full	£1,407.80	CIPFA	1
Accounting Technician	Association of Accounting Technicians	Part Time	Partial	£753.84	Association of Accounting Technicians – London	1
Associate Membership	IEMA Associate Environmental Management	Part Time	Partial	£552.00	University of Bath	1
BA (Bachelor of Arts)	Management & Business Studies	Part Time	Partial	£531.20	Queen's Belfast	1
BSc (Bachelor of Science)	BSc Honours in Business	Part Time	Partial	£1,429.30	UUJ Jordanstown	2
BSc (Bachelor of Science)	Environmental Studies	Part Time	Partial	£488.00	Open University	1
BTEC HNC (Business & Technology Education Council) (Higher National Diploma)	Planning	Part Time	Partial	£1,124.86	Belfast Metropolitan College	2
BTEC National Certificate (Business & Technology Education Council)	BTEC Nat Cert in Vehicle Repair	Part Time	Partial	£852.80	Lisburn Technical College	4

Qualification	Course Title	Full/Part Time	Fully Funded/ Partially Funded	Total Costs Paid by DOE	Institution	No. of Staff
BTEC National Certificate (Business & Technology Education Council)	BTEC Nat Cert in Vehicle Repair & Technology, City & Guilds Level 4.	Part Time	Partial	£276.80	Lisburn Technical College	1
BTEC National Diploma (Business & Technology Education Council)	Countryside and Fisheries Management	Part Time	Partial	£275.00	North West Regional College	2
CIM Pro Cert (Chartered Institute of Marketing)	Marketing	Part Time	Partial	£841.60	Belfast Metropolitan College	1
CIMA Professional Accountancy Qualification (Chartered Institute of Management Accountants)	Chartered Management Accountant	Part Time	Partial	£544.75	CIMA	1
City & Guilds	Computer Aided Design	Part Time	Partial	£145.60	South Eastern Regional College, Bangor	1
Degree in Understanding Law	LLB W200- Understanding Law.	Part Time	Partial	£1,000.00	Open University	1
Foundation Degree	Information Communication and Technology	Part Time	Partial	£272.00	Open University	11
HNC in Business (Higher National Certificate)	HNC in Business	Part Time	Partial	£200.00	South Eastern Regional College, Bangor	1
IATI (Accounting Technician Ireland)	Accounting Technicians in Ireland	Part Time	Partial	£962.40	ATI	1
HNC Level 2	Environment	Part Time	Partial	£1,093.00	Open University	1
MA (Master of Arts)	Town & Country Planning	Part Time	Partial	£3,499.75	Uni of West of England, Bristol	3
Member of Association of Chartered Certified	Association of Chartered Certified Accountants	Part Time	Partial	£213.60	UUJ Jordanstown	1
MSc (Master of Science)	Environmental Management	Part Time	Partial	£5,448.00	University of Ulster	6
MSc (Master of Science)	Environmental Toxicology & Pollution Monitoring	Part Time	Partial	£912.00	University of Ulster	1
MSc (Master of Science)	Geographic Information Science	Part Time	Partial	£864.00	University of Ulster	1
MSc (Master of Science)	Human Resource Management	Part Time	Partial	£912.00	UUJ Jordanstown	1
MSc (Master of Science)	Science	Part Time	Partial	£912.00	University of Ulster	1
PgDip (Post Graduate Diploma)	Geographical Information Systems	Part Time	Partial	£1,184.00	University of Ulster	1
PgDip (Postgraduate Diploma)	Analytical Chemistry	Part Time	Partial	£660.00	Swansea University	1
PgDip (Postgraduate Diploma)	Cultural Management	Part Time	Partial	£912.00	University of Ulster	1

Qualification	Course Title	Full/Part Time	Fully Funded/ Partially Funded	Total Costs Paid by DOE	Institution	No. of Staff
PgDip (Postgraduate Diploma)	Environmental Toxicology & Pollution Monitoring	Part Time	Partial	£1,840.00	University of Ulster	2
PgDip (Postgraduate Diploma)	Town & Country Planning	Part Time	Partial	£1,421.20	Queen's University	1
PgDip/MSc (Postgraduate Diploma/ Master of Science)	Aquatic Ecosystem Management	Part Time	Partial	£1,000.00	Edinburgh University	1
Total Cost				**£32,879.50**		

2009/10 AQW 3758/11-15 Response Template

Qualification	Course Title	Full/Part Time	Fully Funded/ Partially Funded	Total Costs Paid by DOE	Institution	No. of Staff
BSc (Bachelor of Science)	Environmental Planning	Full Time	Full	£16,580.00	Queen's University	1
CIPFA Diploma (Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy)	CIPFA Diploma	Part Time	Full	£1,981.00	CIPFA	1
MSc (Master of Science)	Urban Planning & Property Development	Full Time	Full	£31,090.00	UUJ Jordanstown	2
Access Diploma	Access Diploma in Social Sciences & Humanities.	Part Time	Partial	£206.00	NRC Coleraine	1
BSc (Bachelor of Science)	BSC Hons in Business Studies	Part Time	Partial	£884.00	UUJ Jordanstown	1
BSc (Bachelor of Science)	BSC Hons in Business Studies.	Part Time	Partial	£355.20	Magee College, Londonderry.	1
BTEC National Certificate (Business & Technology Education Council)	BTEC Nat Cert in Vehicle Repair & Technology	Part Time	Partial	£299.20	Lisburn Technical College	1
BTEC National Certificate (Business & Technology Education Council)	BTEC National Certificate in Motor Vehicle Engineering	Part Time	Partial	£240.00	Lisburn Technical College	1
Degree in Understanding Law	LLB W200- Understanding Law.	Part Time	Partial	£1,000.00	Open University	1
Diploma	Administrative Management	Part Time	Partial	£800.00	Belfast Metropolitan College	1
Diploma	LCCI Private Secretary Diploma	Part Time	Partial	£535.00	Belfast Metropolitan College	1
Diploma	LOCI (London Chamber of Commerce and Industry) Private Secretary's Diploma	Part Time	Partial	£316.80	LOCI	1
Foundation Degree	ICT	Part Time	Partial	£320.00	Open University	1

Qualification	Course Title	Full/Part Time	Fully Funded/ Partially Funded	Total Costs Paid by DOE	Institution	No. of Staff
HNC - Administration & IT Management (Higher National Certificate)	HNC - Administration & IT Management.	Part Time	Partial	£288.00	UUJ Jordanstown	1
HNC - Higher National Certificate	Estate Management	Part Time	Partial	£864.00	Belfast Metropolitan College	2
M Phil (Master of Philosophy)	Setting Standards for the Marine Environment	Part Time	Partial	£912.00	University of Ulster	1
MA (Master of Arts)	Town & Country Planning	Part Time	Partial	£3,000.00	Uni of West of England, Bristol	3
MBA (Master of Business Administration)	Business Administration	Part Time	Partial	£1,000.00	University of Ulster	1
Member of Association of Chartered Certified Accountants	Association of Chartered Certified Accountants	Part Time	Partial	£644.40	UUJ Jordanstown	1
MSc (Master of Science)	Aquatic Ecosystem Management	Part Time	Partial	£1,000.00	Edinburgh University	1
MSc (Master of Science)	Environmental Management	Part Time	Partial	£6,972.00	University of Ulster	8
MSc (Master of Science)	Environmental Toxicology and Pollution Monitoring	Part Time	Partial	£936.00	Open University	1
MSc (Master of Science)	Environmental Toxicology and Pollution Monitoring	Part Time	Partial	£3,744.00	University of Ulster	4
MSc (Master of Science)	Science	Part Time	Partial	£944.00	Open University	1
Nebosh Level 3 certificate in Occupational H&S	Nebosh Level 3 certificate in Occupational Health & Safety.	Part Time	Partial	£100.00	UUJ Jordanstown	1
PgDip (Post Graduate Diploma)	Geographical Information Systems	Part Time	Partial	£480.00	Uni of Ulster	11
PgDip (Postgraduate Diploma)	Cultural Management	Part Time	Partial	£992.00	University of Ulster	1
PgDip (Postgraduate Diploma)	Environmental Management	Part Time	Partial	£912.00	University of Ulster	1
PgDip (Postgraduate Diploma)	Environmental Protection	Part Time	Partial	£1,000.00	University of Ulster	1
PgDip (Postgraduate Diploma)	Environmental Toxicology and Pollution Monitoring	Part Time	Partial	£1,848.00	University of Ulster	2
PgDip (Postgraduate Diploma)	Geography	Part Time	Partial	£880.00	Queen's University	1
Total Cost				**£81,123.60**		

2010/11 AQW 3758/11-15 Response Template

Qualification	Course Title	Full/Part Time	Fully Funded/ Partially Funded	Total Costs Paid by DOE	Institution	No. of Staff
BSc (Bachelor of Science)	Environmental Planning	Full Time	Full	£16,880.00	Queen's	1
CIPFA Diploma (Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy)	CIPFA Diploma -	Part Time	Full	£3,416.00	CIPFA	1
MSc (Master of Science)	Urban Planning & Property Development	Full Time	Full	£16,880.00	UUJ Jordanstown	1
NEBOSH (National Examination Board in Occupational Safety & Health)	NEBOSH General Certificate	Full Time	Full	£1,024.00	Safety Advice Centre	1
Access Diploma	Access Diploma in Social Sciences & Humanities.	Part Time	Partial	£297.00	NRC Coleraine	1
BSc (Bachelor of Science)	BSc (Hons) Business Studies	Part Time	Partial	£932.00	University of Ulster Coleraine	1
BSc (Bachelor of Science)	BSC Hons in Business Studies	Part Time	Partial	£726.40	UUJ Jordanstown	1
BSc (Bachelor of Science)	BSC Hons in Business Studies.	Part Time	Partial	£1075.60	Magee College	2
BTEC National Certificate (Business & Technology Education Council)	BTEC Nat Cert in Vehicle Repair & Technology	Part Time	Partial	£284.24	Lisburn Technical College	1
Degree in Understanding Law	LLB W200- Understanding Law.	Part Time	Partial	£1,000.00	Open University	1
HNC - Administration & IT Management. (Higher National Certificate)	HNC - Administration & IT Management.	Part Time	Partial	£288.00	UUJ Jordanstown	1
MA (Master of Arts)	Cultural Management	Part Time	Partial	£955.20	University of Ulster	1
MA (Master of Arts)	Town & Country Planning	Part Time	Partial	£2000.00	University of England, Bristol.	2
Member of Association of Chartered Certified Accountants	Association of Chartered Certified Accountants	Part Time	Partial	£644.40	UUJ Jordanstown	1
MSc (Master of Science)	Earth Science	Part Time	Partial	£288.00	Open University	1
MSc (Master of Science)	Environmental Management	Part Time	Partial	£7540.80	University of Ulster	8
MSc (Master of Science)	Geographic Information Systems	Part Time	Partial	£256.80	University of Ulster	1
MSc (Master of Science)	Science	Part Time	Partial	£972.00	Open University	1
National Diploma in Advance Driving Instruction	Rospa Diploma in Advanced Motorcycle Instruction	Part Time	Partial	£1,000.00	ROSPA Head Office Birmingham	1
PgDip (Postgraduate Diploma)	Analytical Chemistry	Part Time	Partial	£838.00	Swansea University	1

Qualification	Course Title	Full/Part Time	Fully Funded/ Partially Funded	Total Costs Paid by DOE	Institution	No. of Staff
PgDip (Postgraduate Diploma)	Environmental Protection	Part Time	Partial	£1,000.00	University of Ulster	1
PgDip (Postgraduate Diploma)	Environmental Toxicology and Pollution Monitoring	Part Time	Partial	£1432.80	University of Ulster	2
Total Cost				**£59,731.24**		

2011/12 AQW 3758/11-15 Response Template

Qualification	Course Title	Full/Part Time	Fully Funded/ Partially Funded	Total Costs Paid by DOE	Institution	No. of Staff
CIPFA Professional Qualification (Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy)	CIPFA Professional Qualification	Part Time	Full	£551.00	CIPFA	1
National Diploma	NEBOSH	Part Time	Full	£4,150.00	Health & Safety Services	1
NVQ (National Vocational Qualifications)	Level 4 AAT	Part Time	Full	£1,639.00	CIPFA	1
PgDip (Post Graduate Diploma)	Postgrad Diploma in GIS	Part Time	Full	£1,350.00	University of Ulster, Coleraine.	1
The City and Guilds of London Institute - Essential Skills	C&G Certificate Essential Skills - ICT (Level 2)	Part Time	Full	£298.40	SE Regional College, Lisburn	1
BSc (Bachelor of Science)	BSc (Hons) Business Studies	Part Time	Partial	£932.00	University of Ulster	1
BSc (Bachelor of Science)	Open Degree: Geology Environmental Modelling and Control, The Environmental Web	Part Time	Partial	£725.20	Open University	1
Certificate in Business Studies	An Introduction to Business Studies	Part Time	Partial	£450.00	Open University	1
Certified Technician	Comp TIA A+	Part Time	Partial	£1,000.00	Home Learning College	1
Degree in Understanding Law	LLB W200- Understanding Law.	Part Time	Partial	£1,000.00	Open University	1
LLM (Master of Law)	LLM Environmental Law and Sustainable Development	Part Time	Partial	£457.45	Queen's Belfast	1
MSc (Master of Science)	Environmental Management	Part Time	Partial	£2097.55	University of Ulster	4
MSc (Master of Science)	Environmental Toxicology & Pollution Monitoring	Part Time	Partial	£2884.90	University of Ulster	4
MSc (Master of Science)	Geographic Information Systems	Part Time	Partial	£725.20	University of Ulster	1

Qualification	Course Title	Full/Part Time	Fully Funded/ Partially Funded	Total Costs Paid by DOE	Institution	No. of Staff
MSc (Master of Science)	Law in Environmental Planning & Sustainable Development	Part Time	Partial	£3,600.00	Queen's, Belfast	1
PgDip (Postgraduate Diploma)	Analytical Chemistry	Part Time	Partial	£985.00	Swansea University	1
PgDip (Postgraduate Diploma)	Archaeology	Part Time	Partial	£825.20	University of Ulster	1
PgDip (Postgraduate Diploma)	Geographic Information Systems	Part Time	Partial	£274.47	University of Ulster	1
PhD in Business Process Improvement	PhD in Business Process Improvement	Part Time	Partial	£1,000.00	University of Ulster	1
Total Cost				**£24,945.37**		

Environmental Impact Assessments: Fees

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the suitability of the £10,000 fee for Environmental Impact Assessments on farms, given that environmental impact information is already gathered under the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control regulations.
(AQW 3841/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am advised that the environmental impact information provided for Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) licensing cannot be used as an alternative to an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for farms as they are separate regulatory processes. I have requested further advice as to why information for an IPPC cannot be used for an EIA. However, in recognition that there may be a degree of overlap between the two processes, the Department intends to consider how the work carried out in support of an IPPC application would need to be supplemented to satisfy EIA requirements. Any re-assessment of the additional EIA application fee for farms will be subject to the outcome of this work. I have also asked when will the consideration by my Department next be concluded and shall update the member further in due course.

Councils: Leasing of Council Property

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment to list the councils that have a policy on the leasing of council property.
(AQW 4424/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My officials have contacted each district council and have been advised that none operates a formal policy on the leasing of council property. Each case is dealt with on its own merits against the background of the council's wider policies on the acquisition and disposal, and with the benefit of legal advice.

I have been impressed by the actions of some councils – Newry and Mourne in particular – where opportunities to "lease" land or property to local organisations, with my approval has worked well. Finally, I instructed officials a number of months ago to share this best practice with other councils in an effort, in these difficult times, to create new opportunities for leasing, letting and renting of property to local organisations to enable communities to be better served.

EU Infraction Fines

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment what EU environmental infraction fines could be imposed, based on the current state of the environment.
(AQW 4479/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In my view the current risk of EU environmental fines being imposed on Northern Ireland because of the state of the environment is low. That is because officials in the Department, often in conjunction with the other UK administrations, seek to ensure that all European environmental legislation is fully transposed into our national legislation in a timely and effective manner. Where the European Commission instigates infraction proceedings, our approach is to engage with the Commission to either defend our position or to identify the necessary action to fulfil our obligations. In the case of the latter this may be through introducing revised policy, legislation or enforcement activity within an agreed timescale. The Commission's objective is usually to achieve compliance rather than impose a fine and to date our approach has worked well with no fines having been imposed. We will continue to work closely with the Commission to ensure that this remains the position in the future.

The Department is currently dealing with six live infractions where it is the Commission's view that either transposition or implementation issues exist. These relate to the Public Participation Directive, the Wild Birds Directive, the Water Framework Directive, the End of Life Vehicles Directive and the Driving Licences Directive.

I also understand that, while there is no current infraction case relating to the protection and restoration of Modiolus in Strangford Lough, the Commission has received a letter of complaint from the Ulster Wildlife Trust. Should the Commission contact us in relation to this complaint, I will work closely with the DARD Minister on practical measures to try to ensure that infraction proceedings are not instigated against both Departments.

MOT Tests

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to the proposed changes to MOT tests, whether any financial support will be made available for small automobile repair shops to invest in the technology necessary to prepare vehicles for the proposed revised MOT test.
(AQW 4554/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The proposed changes to MOT tests are required by European Commission Roadworthiness Directive 2009/40/EC (as amended). The Department must implement such Directives to avoid possible infraction proceedings and resultant fines.

The MOT test changes include checks of malfunction indicator lights. The majority of established repair shops have the diagnostic equipment and systems required to ensure that they can deal with auto-electronic system failures or have arrangements for diagnostic equipment to be accessed. The Department has no plans at present to make financial support available for small repair businesses to assist in purchase of such equipment.

The new tests do not apply to all vehicles. Those that do so relate to electronic safety and warning systems and vehicle construction and use. However, a number of new test items apply only to goods vehicles, buses and trailers, such as additional braking devices. At the same time, a number of test items are being upgraded to ensure that vehicles are properly maintained and tested. This will make a significant contribution to road safety and environmental protection.

Assembly Questions: Cost of Answering

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of the Environment for an estimate of the average cost to his Department to respond to written, oral and urgent oral Assembly Questions tabled by Jim Allister MLA, since May 2011.
(AQW 4597/11-15)

Mr Attwood: OFMDFM have provided central guidance on answering this AQ. The Department does not routinely estimate the cost of answering Assembly Questions and therefore the information requested is not available.

Sports: Development and Promotion

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the funding his Department has provided for the development and promotion of (i) rugby; (ii) soccer; (iii) Gaelic games; and (iv) motor sports in each of the last three years.
(AQW 4738/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department has provided no funding in each of the last three years for the development and promotion of (i) rugby; (ii) soccer; (iii) Gaelic games; and (iv) motor sports.

Road Safety for Motorists

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what plans his Department has to improve road safety for motorists.
(AQW 4746/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department is currently taking forward a number of plans to improve road safety for motorists.

Road Safety Strategy

The Department has lead responsibility for coordinating the implementation of the Road Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland and works with partners in DRD's Road Service, the Department of Education, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service and Ambulance Service to deliver measures that will save lives on our roads.

The Strategy contains 199 education, engineering and enforcement measures and considers roads, vehicles and road users together to ensure that each takes account of limitations or potential weakness in the other two. There are measures under each of these three areas to address the safety of motorists.

The measures that fall to the Department for delivery mainly focus on improving and supporting positive changes to driver behaviour and attitudes. These aim to improve the training and preparation given to novice drivers, provide for continuing learning throughout their driving life, including remedial education and training for errant drivers, and promotion of messages to raise awareness of poor or dangerous driver behaviours and attitudes that lead to deaths and serious injuries. For those who drive for work, the Department will highlight the risks of 'at work' road collisions and promote with employers the importance of managing occupational road risk and their legal responsibilities in this area.

For more detail on any of these measures I would refer you to the Road Safety Strategy to 2020.

Road safety awareness campaigns

Through its ongoing programme of road safety awareness campaigns the Department continues to deliver messages to motorists and other road users, with particular emphasis on those responsible for causing casualties and those most at risk.

MOT testing

Roadworthiness Directive 2009/40/EC (as amended) has introduced a number of changes to MOT testing to keep pace with advances in motor vehicle technology. A public consultation on the changes was issued by the Department on 14 November and, following its close on 2 January 2012, it is planned to apply the changes to cars, heavy goods vehicles and buses from 1 February 2012. This will ensure such vehicles are properly maintained and tested and make a significant contribution to road safety for motorists.

Marine Conservation

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) what process will be used to determine the Marine Conservation Designation Programme; and (ii) how he will ensure that other Departments, with a responsibility to protect the marine environment, contribute to this process.
(AQW 4779/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

(i) As part of my commitment to marine biodiversity, I intend to take forward legislative provisions for creating a network of national protected areas, known as Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) in our territorial waters.

The approach to identify MCZs will be based upon the use of best available scientific evidence. It is intended that MCZs will complement the existing site designation and protection measures for European marine sites, and contribute to an ecologically coherent UK network.

(ii). Stakeholder participation, including taking account of other Departments interests, will be a crucial element in the designation of MCZs. Social and economic considerations will be fully explored, in parallel with environmental objectives. A duty will be placed on Departments and other public bodies to ensure that the conservation objectives of a designated site are not adversely affected when undertaking their activities.

Guidance on MCZs will be developed in tandem with draft Marine legislation and will be consulted upon. While this guidance material will not be statutory, the Department will follow these procedures when designating sites.

Ulster Wildlife Trust

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment how much funding his Department, or its arm's-length bodies, have allocated to the Ulster Wildlife Trust in each of the last five years.
(AQW 4817/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department, through the Northern Ireland Environment Agency's Natural Heritage Grant Programme, has provided funding to the Ulster Wildlife Trust over the last 5 years as follows:

	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Ulster Wildlife Trust Funding	£202,859	£285,314	£199,021	£318,402	£213,593

Public Appointments

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of the Environment to list the public appointments both he and his predecessor have made since May 2007.
(AQW 4822/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As Minister of the Environment I have responsibility for appointing individuals to the following public bodies:

- The Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee (NILGOSC);
- The Local Government Staff Commission for Northern Ireland (LGSC);
- The Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (CNCC);
- The Historic Buildings Council (HBC) and
- The Historic Monuments Council (HMC).

Since May 2007, there have been a total of 49 appointments made to these bodies. The number of appointments made to each of the bodies, as well as the names of the individuals appointed is detailed in the table below.

Public Body	Number of Appointments Made Since May 2007	Names of Individuals Appointed
NILGOSC	11	Trevor Salmon, Julie Erskine, Joe Donaghy, Celine McCartan, Colin O'Hare, Bumper Graham, Linda Neilan, David Jackson, Ciaran Quigley, Peter Caldwell, eter McMurray
LGSC	7	Mervyn Rankin, Ashley Boreland, Celine Connolly, William Francey MBE, Ald Nigel Hamilton, Ald Geraldine Rice MBE, Seamus Shields
CNCC	10	Patrick Casement, Peter Archdale, Dr Tony Bazley, Patrick Dorrian, Dr Richard Horton, Dr Hilary Kirkpatrick, Elizabeth McCullough, Samuel McGregor, Prof Bernard Smith, Andrew Upton
HBC	11	Brian Banks, Kenneth Boston, Cathal Crimmins, Joe Diamond, Noelle Houston, Hannah Kenny, Alistair Lindsay, Robert Martin, Patrick McGuigan, Robert Miles, Dr Patricia Warke
HMC	10	Prof Gabriel Cooney, Henry Bell, Michael Conway, Tim Cunningham, Marga Foley, Suzanne Lyle, Phillip Macdonald, John McGillan, Anne-Marie McStocker, Stephen Russell

Planning Policy Statement 21

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the review of PPS 21.
(AQW 4869/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The review of the operation of PPS21 is nearing completion. My intention is to ensure consistency of application of the PPS and appropriate flexibility in its operation, consistent with its content and substance.

Planning Policy Statement 16

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on draft PPS 16.
(AQW 4870/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Following public consultation on draft PPS 16, there was close engagement with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board over the summer.

The Environment Committee considered the outcome of the consultation on 24th November and I will take account of the Committee's comments in finalising PPS16 for submission to the Executive in the near future.

Planning Applications

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how many meetings he has attended in relation to individual planning applications since coming to office.
(AQW 4988/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As Minister of the Environment I have had 28 meeting with officials and 48 meetings with external individuals on planning applications since coming to office.

Marine Conservation

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment whether Marine Conservation Zones will be introduced as part of the Marine Bill; and what targets will be set.
(AQW 5026/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Marine Bill will provide for a new national designation process for the establishment of Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) in Northern Ireland's territorial waters to enhance protection for nationally important marine wildlife and habitats.

This new flexible designation process will complement the existing site designation and protection measures for European marine sites.

The Department is committed to having a network of effectively managed Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in place by 2020, comprising European marine sites and MCZs.

MPAs will be an important contribution to the achievement of Good Environmental Status. This is required under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive by 2020 and will ensure that marine ecosystems continue to provide economic and social benefits.

Waterways: North Down Area

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of discharge consents in operation for waterways in the North Down area.
(AQW 5034/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, it is an offence to discharge trade or sewage effluent to waterways or to water in underground strata without the consent of the Department of the Environment.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) administers a system of discharge consents which lay down conditions relating to the quality and quantity of effluent that may be discharged. The conditions are formulated using scientific protocols which ensure that the discharge can be sustained by the receiving waterway without damage to the aquatic environment and without breaching national or EU Directive standards.

Consents have been issued for 10 waste water treatment works (WWTWs) and 78 for sewer systems which discharge to waterway in the North Down area.

NIEA has consented 27 industrial and commercial premises for discharges to waterway in the North Down area.

NIEA also issue consents for discharges from single domestic dwellings. There are approximately 554 consented discharges from single domestic dwellings in the North Down area. It is not possible to give an accurate number which discharge to waterway as the current domestic consents database does not record information regarding discharge destination.

Speed Limits

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the maximum speed limit vehicles can travel at on (i) roads; (ii) dual carriage ways; (iii) motorways, broken down by type of vehicle.
(AQW 5122/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Comprehensive information on speed limits is made available in the Official Highway Code for Northern Ireland.

This information includes a table which details the maximum speed limits applicable on each category of road - broken down by type of vehicle. A copy of this table is provided.

Speed Limits	**Built-up areas**	**Single carriage-ways**	**Dual carriage-ways**	**Motorways**
Type of vehicle	**mph (km/h)**	**mph (km/h)**	**mph (km/h)**	**mph (km/h)**
Cars and motorcycles (including car-derived vans up to 2 tonnes maximum laden weight)	30 (48)	60 (96)	70 (112)	70 (112)
Cars towing caravans or trailers (including car-derived vans and motorcycles)	30 (48)	50 (80)	60 (96)	60 (96)
Buses, coaches and minibuses (not exceeding 12 metres in overall length)	30 (48)	50 (80)	60 (96)	70 (112)
Goods vehicles (not exceeding 7.5 tonnes maximum laden weight)	30 (48)	50 (80)	60 (96)	70† (112)
Goods vehicles (exceeding 7.5 tonnes maximum laden weight)	30 (48)	40 (64)	50 (80)	60 (96)

* The 30 mph limit usually applies to all traffic on all roads with street lighting unless signs show otherwise.

† 60mph (96 km/h) if articulated or towing a trailer

Councils: Borrowed Money

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of the Environment how much money each council has borrowed from banks or other lending institutions, excluding the Consolidated Fund and the National Loans Fund, in each of the last three years, broken down by (i) council; (ii) the amount borrowed each year; (iii) the loan provider; and (iv) the total outstanding debt.
(AQW 5157/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In answer to AQW 2971/11-15 the department had recorded the council borrowing from the Consolidated Fund. The table below displays council borrowing from sources external to the Consolidated Fund from 2008/2009 onwards plus a breakdown of providers.

Council Borrowing Table from Non Consolidated Fund

Council	Borrowing 2008/2009	Borrowing 2009/2010	Borrowing 2010/2011	Borrowing 2011/2012 (as of 29/11/11)	Total Outstanding Debt (as of 31/3/11)	Provider (£)
Ards	0	0	0	0	7,775,000	Barclays Bank plc (5,275,000) Bank of Scotland (1,000,000) Dresdner Bank AG (1,000,000) Chase Nominees Ltd (500,000)
Ballymena	1,000,000	0	0	0		South Lanarkshire Council
	1,000,000	0	0	0		South Ayrshire Council
	1,000,000	0	0	0		City of Edinburgh
					0	
Carrick-fergus	143,588	142,266	281,385	82,126	1,652,939	Northern Bank
Coleraine	1,000,000	2,000,000	2,000,000	0		Northern Bank (5,000,000)
	0	3,000,000	0	0		Barclays Bank PLC (3,000,000)
					7,591,503	
Craigavon	0	0	0	0	6,500,000	Dresdner Bank AG (1,500,000) Lancashire County Council (2,000,000) Bank of Scotland (1,000,000) Stroud and Swindon (1,000,000) Saffron Walden Hertz (1,000,000)

Motorcycle Riders: Compulsory Basic Training

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment what provision has been made to ensure that learner drivers who drive scooters with an engine capacity of under 125cc (i) are made aware of the forthcoming change to the law which will require them to pass a compulsory basic training test; and (ii) will be able to secure a test date within a reasonable time once the change in the law has been enacted.
(AQW 5235/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Compulsory basic training (CBT) consists of a mandatory training course which is delivered by approved motorcycle instructors (AMIs). The training is delivered over three modules and on completion of training a CBT certificate is issued by the AMI, provided the rider has demonstrated that they can ride safely on the roads.

From 21 February 2011 legislation introduced a requirement for all new moped and motorcycle riders to complete CBT training before being permitted to ride unaccompanied on a public road. Riders who had provisional entitlement before the legislation came into effect are not initially affected by the change, but will have to comply by 21 February 2012.

DVA has striven to ensure that all motorcycle enthusiasts have been made fully aware of the new legislation through:

- letters sent in November 2010 to registered keepers of motorcycles with a cylinder capacity of 125cc and below;
- press releases issued in November 2010 and February 2011;
- CBT leaflets, which have been included with all provisional licences issued since 21 February 2011;

- editorials in Irish Road Racer magazine;
- leaflets distributed during 2010-11 at provincial motorcycle shows;
- leaflets distributed to Education and Library Boards, theory test centres, motor tax offices and motorcycle accessory shops;
- social media channels; and
- the NI Direct website, which provides information relating to CBT training and how to book a test once a CBT certificate has been obtained.

DVA also has established measures in place to raise awareness amongst those affected by the new legislation and to accommodate testing demand within key targets.

Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment what progress has been made in implementing the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010; and when the Act will be fully implemented.
(AQW 5286/11-15)

Mr Attwood: There has been considerable progress made in implementing the Goods Vehicle (Licensing of Operators) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010.

Six sets of subordinate regulations are required and work on the regulations is well advanced with four sets already drafted and public consultations on the last two sets of regulations recently issued. The Department plans to bring forward the six sets of regulations to the Assembly Environment Committee in March 2012, with the Goods Vehicle Act commencing operationally in April 2012.

Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (NI) 2011

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of the Environment whether the revised Code of Practice being issued to councils in relation to the new powers contained in the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (NI) 2011 clarify the issue of seaweed removal from beaches.
(AQW 5326/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The revised draft Code of Practice on Litter provides guidance to Crown Authorities and district councils concerning their duty to keep amenity beaches, for which they are responsible, clear of litter between the traditional bathing season of 1 May to 30 September. The draft Code makes clear that the duty does not apply to seaweed.

Paragraph 11.10.5 of the draft Code expressly states that "The duty applies only to items or materials originating from discharges directly to the marine environment as well as discarded items from beach users. As a guide, only litter comprising manufactured or processed items of material that have been discarded, disposed of or abandoned, by intent or accident, should be removed. Litter should include processed food items but it does not include seaweed or twigs, which contribute to maintaining the local ecosystem".

Bathing Waters

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to 4426/11-15, whether he will ensure that ongoing consultation occurs with the Welsh authorities to improve the percentage of Northern Ireland Ireland's bathing waters meeting the 'Excellent' standard.
(AQW 5337/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) work closely with counterparts in the environment agencies of the other devolved administration. There are several active technical groups that lead the development of and sharing of best practice across the UK. The current Chair of the Bathing Waters Technical Advisory Group us from the Environment Agency Wales.

By participating fully in UK Technical Groups, NIEA is well positioned to take full advantage of all pollution prevention and regulatory advances to protect our bathing waters that prove beneficial in other areas of the UK.

DE: Construction Work Payments

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of the Environment what proportion of invoices for construction work have been paid on time by his Department and its arm's length bodies, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 5375/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In addition to construction related work, payments to construction companies may also include lower value maintenance work. It is not possible to separately identify the lower value maintenance work without manually reviewing each individual invoice. Therefore all invoices paid to construction companies have been included.

The table below shows the proportion of invoices paid to construction companies over the last three years which have been paid on time for the Department and its agencies (excluding the Driver and Vehicle Agency).

	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Total invoices paid	440	458	665
Number paid on time	385	403	635
% paid on time	87.5%	88.0%	95.5%

Prior to April 2011, the accounting system used by the DVA did not separately hold the requested information. However, from April 2011, the DVA migrated onto a new accounting system, Account NI, and during the first six months of 2011-12, paid 95% of construction invoices within 30 days.

In light of the Executive commitment to prompt payment of invoices within 10 days to assist businesses with cash flow in the current economic environment. In the latest quarter (July to September 2011) the Department paid 96% of construction invoices within 10 days and 98% within 30 days.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Civil Service: Salaries

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 2566-11/15, to detail the total number of civil or public servants whose annual final salary, including additional payments and plus expenses received, was in excess of (i) £100,000; (ii) £150,000; and (iii) £200,000 in each of the last four years.
(AQW 4666/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The information requested is not readily available and can only be obtained and compiled at disproportionate costs.

Gross Domestic Product: Growth

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what proportion of GDP growth over the last 10 years went to the poorest 10 percent in society.
(AQW 5045/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Annual estimates of Gross Value Added (GVA) are produced by the Office for National Statistics for the countries and regions of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland. GVA is an estimate of the value of output of goods and services produced by a country or region in a given time period. GVA is not a measure of income or living standards and gives no indication of the distribution of wealth across a society. Further, it is not possible to attribute GVA to parts of the population, such as the poorest 10 percent in society.

Apartments: Management

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on any discussions or progress with the Law Commission regarding the reform of the management of apartments.
(AQW 5081/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I met with the Law Commission on 4 October 2011 to discuss multi-unit developments and, during the course of that meeting, the Commission indicated that it had sought, and was analysing, further information with regard to mixed-use developments. I took the opportunity to re-emphasise the importance attaching to this strand of work and the Commission agreed to issue its consultation paper in June 2012.

West Belfast: Spend by the Department of Finance and Personnel

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail his Department's, and its arm's-length bodies', spend in the West Belfast constituency in each of the last three years; and the proposed spend for each year until 2015.
(AQW 5264/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My Department's spend in the West Belfast constituency in each of the last three years, and the proposed spend for each year until 2015 is set out in the table overleaf.

Financial Year	Resource £'000s	Capital £'000s
2008-09	136	2,127
2009-10	145	5,794
2010-11	390	-

Financial Year	Resource £'000s	Capital £'000s
2011-12	300	420
2012-13	300	-
2013-14	300	-
2014-15	300	-

No expenditure in my Department's arm's length bodies was spent or is expected to be spent in the West Belfast constituency in this period.

Rates: Empty Homes

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of empty homes for which his Department currently receives rates.
(AQW 5274/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The rating of empty homes was introduced on 1st October 2011. As at 27th November 2011 the number of empty homes for which the Land & Property Services has received rates payments, is 7,325.

Rates: 15 Hopefield Park, Portrush

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether rates for the dwelling at 15 Hopefield Park, Portrush are being paid, given that it has been vacant for several years and has been the subject of ongoing complaints from neighbours.
(AQW 5336/11-15)

Mr Wilson: In line with the terms of the Data Protection Act (1998) Land & Property Services cannot comment on the rating status of individual properties. However, following the introduction of the Rating of Empty Homes initiative on 1st October 2011, I can confirm that rates bills were issued to all properties listed as vacant.

DFP: Information Service

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the current (i) number; and (ii) annual cost of staff employed in his Department's Information Service.
(AQW 5352/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The current number of staff employed in the Department's Information Service is 6.4 (FTE) and the annual cost of these staff is £211,044.80.

Legal Profession

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Finance and Personnelwhat independent mechanism is in place to investigate complaints against, or the conduct of, members of the legal profession.
(AQW 5395/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Complaints against solicitors are the responsibility of complaints committees of the Law Society. There is no direct independent mechanism at present although the Lay Observer for Northern Ireland can investigate how complaints have been handled by the Law Society. Conduct matters can be investigated by the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal which operates independently of the Law Society.

Complaints against barristers are heard in the first instance by Disciplinary Committees set up by the Executive Council of the Bar of Northern Ireland. There is no independent mechanism in relation to complaints against barristers, and the Lay Observer has no remit.

Air Passenger Duty

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the potential cost to the Block Grant of abolishing Air Passenger Duty for (i) all flights departing from Northern Ireland airports; and (ii) all flights departing from Northern Ireland airports which are currently charged at the Band B tax rate.
(AQW 5487/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The scope of Air Passenger Duty (APD) powers to be devolved and the precise arrangements for this have yet to be finalised and discussions with the Treasury are ongoing in this regard. However, the draft Programme for Government commits the Executive to eliminating APD on direct long haul flights

While the precise costs in terms of the block adjustment required going forward have yet to be established, we do know that EU rules mean that Northern Ireland will have to bear the full fiscal consequences of reducing the duty. The latest estimates provided by Treasury indicate that approximately £60m will be raised in APD from passengers departing Northern Ireland airports

in 2012-13. Of this, it is estimated that £20m will be raised from all long haul passengers – including those who connect through other airports outside Northern Ireland. One quarter of this revenue, approximately £5m, will come from those departing on direct long haul flights leaving Northern Ireland airports. These estimates have not been updated for the latest Autumn Statement APD forecast.

Ministerial Vehicles

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) whether a policy of insurance or a bond exists for the vehicles that are used by Ministers; (ii) those indemnified by such a policy or bond (iii) the exact wording of the indemnity; and (iv) what class or classes of drivers are indemnified by such a policy or bond.
(AQW 5572/11-15)

Mr Wilson: A Motor Fleet policy of Insurance is in place with Zurich Insurance plc, Policy number 090/1C01/LY704943/6 in the name of the various NI Public Service Bodies who are the "Policyholder". If a motor vehicle "used by a Minister" is the property of or in the custody or control of the Policyholder– i.e. a NI Public Service – then it is insured for the business of the Policyholder. Cover also extends to include use for social, domestic and pleasure purposes if required by the Policyholder.

The policy covers the following (as per the policy document):

- The Policy holder.
- The Driver.
- At the Policyholder's request:
  - any of your principals, directors or employees
  - any passenger
  - the owner of a vehicle on hire or loan or leased to you
  - any member or committee member of your Sports or Social Club
  - the hirer of any agricultural tractor or self-propelled agricultural or forestry machine provided that such hire is permitted by the terms of the certificate
- Any person with the Policyholder's permission is using (but not driving) the vehicle for social domestic and pleasure purposes.

The exact wording of the indemnity is included in the attached annex extracted from the Motor Fleet policy of Insurance.

The Persons or classes of persons entitled to drive are any person on the order or with the permission of the policyholder (NI Public Service). Provided that the person driving holds a licence to drive the vehicle or has held and is not disqualified from holding or obtaining such a licence.

Annex

Section 1 – liability to third parties

We will indemnify the persons detailed in 1, 2 and 3 below in respect of their legal liability for death of or body injury to any person and damage to property.

Type of Cover		
Third party indemnity	1.	The insured person will be indemnified when liability arises out of an accident caused by, or in connection with, the vehicle, or the loading or unloading of the vehicle.
Third Party Contingency Cover	2.	You alone will be indemnified when the liability arises out of an accident caused by, or in connection with, any motor vehicle whilst being used in connection with your business or trade. Provided that: a such vehicle is not your property or held by you under a hire purchase agreement or hired by or leased to you. b you have taken all reasonable steps to ensure that there is in force in respect of such vehicle an insurance that is valid for such use. c if any claim covered by this sub-section 2 is also covered by any other insurance then notwithstanding condition number 4 in section 12 we shall not be liable to make any contribution to such claim.

Type of Cover		
Unauthorised Movement	3.	You or any of your principals, directors or employees will be indemnified when liability arises out of an accident caused by, or arising out of, the driving or movement of any vehicle without the authority of the owner of such vehicle when the vehicle is parked in such a position as to obstruct the legitimate passage or the loading or unloading of the vehicle. In these circumstances the obstructing vehicle shall not be regarded as property held in your trust or in your custody or control.
Third Party Property Limited		Provided always that in respect of any commercial vehicle indemnity under sub-sections 1, 2 and 3 above for damage to property is limited to the amount shown in the schedule (or such greater sum as may be required by the compulsory motor insurance legislation in the country in which the insured event occurs) in respect of any one accident or a series of accidents arising out of one event.
	4.	Following the death of any person entitled to indemnity we will in respect of the liability incurred indemnify such person's legal personnel representatives in the terms of this section.
Legal Costs	5.	In respect of any event which may be the subject of indemnity under this section we will also pay: a solicitor's fees for representation at any Court of summary jurisdiction or at any Coroner's Inquest or Fatal Inquiry. b the cost of legal services arranged by us for defending a charge of manslaughter, causing death by dangerous driving or causing death by careless driving when under influence of drink or drugs (or any equivalent local charge in a country specified in sub-section 1 of section 5). c all other costs and expenses incurred with our written consent.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Medical Insurance

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list the private medical insurance companies in Britain and Ireland whose policies are accepted by the (i) Health Service; and (ii) Erne Hospital, Enniskillen
(AQW 5126/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):

(i) The five Health and Social Care Trusts have contracts that include the following medical insurance companies:

- AVIVA;
- AXA;
- CIGNA;
- Groupama Healthcare;
- Simply Health;
- Standard Life/PRU Health;
- WPA;
- BUPA;
- Prudential Health Insurance Ltd;
- Universal Provident; and
- BENEDEN.

(ii) BUPA is the only private medical insurance company with which the Western Trust has a contract and which lists the Erne Hospital as an approved hospital.

Kinship Care Arrangements

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children, currently in kinship care arrangements that are supervised by his Department, have siblings in (i) residential care; and (ii) foster care.
(AQW 5148/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of children in kinship foster care who have siblings in residential care and/or foster care is set out in the table below.

Children currently in kinship foster care who have siblings in residential care and/or foster care

Trust	Residential Care	Foster Care
Northern	2	12
Southern	1	8
Belfast*	-	-
South Eastern	5	21

Trust	Residential Care	Foster Care
Western	20	17

* Belfast Trust has indicated that this information could only be provided at disproportionate cost within the timeframe requested.

Kinship Care

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children, currently in kinship care arrangements that are supervised by his Department, and who are not subject to Care or Residence Orders, are currently receiving social work support.
(AQW 5149/11-15)

Mr Poots: The table below reflects the number of children, currently in kinship care arrangements, who are not subject to Care or Residence Orders, and who are currently receiving social work support from Health and Social Care Trusts.

Trust	Northern*	Southern	Belfast	South Eastern	Western
Voluntary Accommodated under Article 21 of Children Order	-	14	90	66	39

Source: Health and Social Care Trusts

* The Northern HSC Trust has indicated that this information could only be provided at disproportionate cost within the timeframe requested.

Kinship Care: 2001 Munby Judgement

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans are in place to ensure that his Department complies with the terms of the 2001 Munby judgement.
(AQW 5165/11-15)

Mr Poots: My replies to AQW 4095/11-15 and AQW 4607/11-15 refer. Department officials are meeting with colleagues in the Health and Social Care Board before Christmas to discuss this and other issues in relation to Kinship Care

West Belfast: Spend by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his Department's, and its arm's-length bodies', spend in the West Belfast constituency in each of the last three years; and the proposed spend for each year until 2015.
(AQW 5265/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department does not routinely capture financial information by constituency and as such the information could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Dental Care

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people registered to receive Health Service dental care in each of the last five years.
(AQW 5268/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of people registered to receive Health Service dental care in each of the last five years is shown in table 1 below. Figures shown are as at November of each year.

Prior to August 2009 the duration of a dental registration was 15 months. In August 2009 the duration was increased to 24 months for claims submitted after that date. This increased duration of registrations has contributed to the increase in dental registration figures in 2011.

Table 1: Number of patients registered to receive Health Service dental care.

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Dental registrations	873,569	861,705	887,772	931,101	1,104,832

Source: Family Practitioner Services, Information and Registration Unit - HSC Business Services Organisation.

Respite Care and Facilities

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the level of funding allocated for respite care and facilities in each of the last five years, broken down by each Health and Social Care Trust area.
(AQW 5272/11-15)

Mr Poots: The level of funding allocated for respite care and facilities in each of the last five years, broken down by each Health and Social Care Trust area, is not readily available and can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Health Estate: Construction Work Tendering Criteria

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the rationale behind the criteria that are used to determine the companies which are eligible to tender for construction work within the Health Estate.
(AQW 5296/11-15)

Mr Poots: The rationale behind the criteria that are used to determine the companies which are eligible to tender for construction work within the Health Estate is to allow the Client to select a limited number of firms (usually 6 firms) that are best suited to deliver the particular project in an efficient and effective manner.

When setting the criteria used for selection, there is a requirement on the part of Contracting Authorities (such as DHSSPS arm's length bodies) to comply with the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 (as amended), Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy and best practice guidance.

Health Estate: Construction Work Tendering Criteria

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) why companies which have a long record of completing public building contracts to a high standard can be excluded from tendering for new building contracts within the Health Estate; and (ii) how these companies can become eligible for tendering.
(AQW 5299/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) No company is per se excluded from tendering.

A pre-qualification process is used in connection with all new building contracts within the Health Estate in order to allow the Client to select a limited number of firms (usually 6 firms) who are best suited to deliver the particular project in an efficient and effective manner.

DHSSPS arm's length bodies have a number of pre-qualification methodologies that can be used to determine a select list of firms, viz.

- Constructionline Database with a random selection function;
- DHSSPS Register of Contractors with a rotation system;
- DHSSPS random selection process; and
- Scored selection criteria (used on major projects).

The following is a summary of the reasons why companies may be excluded from the opportunity to tender for a particular project:

- Fails to meet the minimum requirements;
- Not on the DHSSPS Register on Contractors;
- On the DHSSPS Register of Contractors, but does not have the required facility/ work categories;
- On the DHSSPS Register of Contractors, with the required facility/ work categories, but not in the top six companies by rota order;
- Not on the list produced by random selection; and
- Overall score against selection criteria is outside the scores of the top six companies (used on major projects).

The fact that a company is excluded from an opportunity to tender for a particular project does not mean that the company does not have the technical and professional ability to enable it to deliver a successful outcome.

(ii) Companies, including those which have a long record of completing public building contracts to a high standard, can become eligible or enhance their eligibility for tendering for new building contracts within the Health Estate by any of the following methods:

- Obtaining registration on Constructionline with work categories that match the company's experience;
- Obtaining registration on the DHSSPS Register of Contractors with facility and work categories that match the company's experience;
- Obtaining experience in building contracts with complex engineering services and/or that are multi-functional;
- Obtaining experience in building health sector projects through, for example, forming joint ventures with other companies; and

- Ensuring that all information requested in pre-qualification documentation is submitted and providing relevant previous experience in response to the selection criteria.

Road Accidents

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of (a) cyclists; and (b) pedestrians who have been admitted to hospital as a result of an injury caused by a road accident in each of the last 10 years; and (ii) the total number of cyclists and pedestrians who have been killed as a result of road accidents in each of the last 10 years.
(AQW 5331/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information is not available on the number of cyclists and pedestrians who have been admitted to hospital as a result of an injury caused by a road accident.

The number of cyclists and pedestrians who have been killed as a result of road accidents in each of the last 10 years is published by the Police Service of Northern Ireland and can be found at the following address;

http://www.psni.police.uk/index/updates/updates_statistics/updates_road_traffic_statistics.htm

DHSSPS: Information Service

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current (i) number; and (ii) annual cost of staff employed in his Department's Information Service.
(AQW 5353/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is shown in the table.

Table: DHSSPS Information Office Staffing and Cost

Number of Information Office Staff	Annual Cost (2010/11)
11	£370,907

Supporting People Programme

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 4281/11-15, (i) whether the Western Health and Social Care Trust has allocated funding to all of the projects jointly funded by the Supporting People Programme Trust; and (ii) to detail the level of funding allocated to each project.
(AQW 5357/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) The Western Health and Social Care Trust has contracts with 26 external organisations to provide care to clients who are supported by the Supporting People programme. Of the 61 schemes notified by DSD under AQW 4281/11-15, there will be a number of schemes that provide only a housing element without any associated HSC care package. Furthermore, and as highlighted in the table below, certain organisations provide multiple schemes.

(ii) In 2011/12, the trust allocated funding of £2.6m to these organisations, as detailed in the following table:

Name of External Providers	Value
Action For Children - NCH	£14,500
Apex Housing - Mullagh House	£23,889
Apex Various Sheltered Schemes - Abbey House, Beechwood Court, Fr Mulvey Park, Glenbrook House & Mulvey House (Strabane)	£7,057
Ballyoan House Apex Housing	£131,202
Camphill Community	£200,337
Castlehill Praxis Challenge	£46,231
Cheshire House Leonard Cheshire	£151,810
Clondermott House Apex Housing	£115,446
Daleview Apex Housing	£8,725
Damien House First Housing Aid	£73,027
Dunvale House Apex Housing	£128,172

Name of External Providers	Value
First Housing Aid & Support-Various Schemes Derry - Hawkins St, City Court, Old School Lane, John St Rivercourts	£38,930
Fold - Gnangara	£172,918
Francis St Hostel First Housing Aid	£31,686
Methodists Missions	£71,719
Northlands	£126,591
Positive Futures	£598,676
Potensial Limited	£141,548
Praxis Northland Road	£60,190
Praxis Supported - 6 & 8 Brewsters Close, 4 Bonds Street, 36 Roulston Avenue, 36 Glenbank Road, 19 Wellington Street, 103 Marlborough Road & 34 Grafton Street	£75,348
Railway Court Apex Housing	£83,505
Ramona House First Housing Aid	£102,232
Seven Oaks	£12,986
St Columbs House In The Wells Apex Housing	£15,026
The Willows Praxis	£41,460
Woodbank House Apex Housing	£132,265
Total	**£2,605,476**

Parkinson's Disease Society: Funding Offer

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department intends to accept the offer by the Parkinson's Disease Society to finance a nurse specialising in Parkinson's Disease in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust area for two financial years.
(AQW 5365/11-15)

Mr Poots: Responsibility for the commissioning of specialist nurse services in Northern Ireland rests with the Public Health Agency. I would encourage the Parkinson's Disease Society to engage with the Agency to discuss their offer of funding.

Dermatological Treatment

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many patients have been referred for private dermatological treatment; and (ii) the cost of this treatment, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 5379/11-15)

Mr Poots: Private dermatological treatment is taken to refer to treatment that takes place in the Independent Sector, which is commissioned and paid for by the Health Service.

The table below details (i) the number of patients that received an outpatient assessment or inpatient treatment in the Dermatology specialty in the Independent Sector, commissioned by the Health Service, and (ii) the total expenditure on Independent Sector dermatological treatment, for each of the last five financial years.

	Outpatient[1]		Inpatient[2]	
Financial Year	Total No. of Appointments	Expenditure (£)	Total No. of Appointments	Expenditure (£)
2011/12[3]	986	208,456	0	320,011
2010/11	3,288	1,148,925	1,125	563,422
2009/10	13,063	2,682,878	553	2,137,438
2008/09[4]	7,855	997,886	673	145,971
2007/08[4]	3,666	380,865	818	101,440

Source: Departmental Returns IS1 (Parts 1 & 2) and HSCB

1 Figures relate to first and review consultant-led appointments

2 Figures relate to daycase and ordinary admissions

3 For appointments that took place in the quarters ending June and September 2011

4 The South Eastern HSC Trust has been unable to provide expenditure figures for 2007/08 and 2008/09.

The Health and Social Care Board have advised that the timing of expenditure does not match directly with activity.

HIV

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the growing number of people diagnosed with HIV, what action his Department is taking to (i) reduce the stigma associated with the disease; and (ii) promote sexual health.
(AQW 5381/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department's Sexual Health Promotion Strategy and Action Plan aims to improve protect and promote the sexual health and well-being of the population. The Strategy adopts a specific approach to deliver education and information programmes to promote openness about sexual health issues, including tackling discrimination associated with HIV.

The multi-agency Sexual Health Improvement Network, chaired by the Public Health Agency, is taking forward a number of actions in support of the Strategy which will contribute to reducing the stigma associated with HIV. These include: raising awareness of HIV; provision of community based and outreach preventative programmes, particularly for those most at risk; provision of training in sexual health skills; and the improvement of sexual health services.

In addition my Department funds a number of voluntary organisations that provide information and support on sexual health matters including HIV/AIDS.

Autism Bill

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he intends to develop and contribute to a cross-departmental budget to achieve the objectives of the Autism Bill; and if so, to provide a timescale of when this budget will be in place.
(AQW 5387/11-15)

Mr Poots: All Departments and stakeholders are currently engaged in the development of the Autism Strategy. The aim of the Strategy is to improve services and support for people with autism and their families and carers throughout their lives. Departments will be mindful of budgetary implications, and the potential for pooling resources, throughout the development process.

Prisoners: Addiction

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of prisoners addicted to drugs; (ii) the number of prisoners undertaking a drug rehabilitation programme; and (iii) the current number of places on drug rehabilitation programmes that are available to prisoners..
(AQW 5388/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information is set out below

i) Figures from the Drug Misuse Database in 2010/11 show that 247 prisoners presented for treatment for drug misuse. The Drug Misuse Database holds information on problem drug users, who present to services for the first time, or for the first time in six months or more and who will receive treatment at a drug treatment agency.

   A problem drug user is defined as a person who experiences social, psychological, physical or legal problems (related to intoxication and/or regular excessive consumption and/or dependence) as a consequence of their own use of drugs or chemical substances. Drugs are defined as any drug, whether prescribed or not, including solvents and tranquilisers, but excluding alcohol and tobacco.

ii) There are currently 28 prisoners on a substitute prescribing programme.

iii) There is no limit to the number of places on drug rehabilitation programmes in prisons. To date in 2011, 126 prisoners have been treated.

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence: Guidelines

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he plans to carry out an assessment of the effectiveness of the revised process for the implementation of the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence guidelines introduced in September 2011.
(AQW 5390/11-15)

Mr Poots: As with all new policies, my officials will be evaluating the effectiveness of this revised process on an ongoing basis and making any revisions necessary as experience accrues.

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence: Guidelines

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the revised process for the implementation of the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence guidelines introduced in September 2011, will apply to medicines issued before 28 September 2011.
(AQW 5391/11-15)

Mr Poots: In developing the new process, the endorsement of a number of Technology Appraisals was delayed. Whilst the details of the revised process will not be applied retrospectively to medicines issued before 28 September 2011, their implementation will be based on the same principles.

My officials have been working with colleagues in the Health and Social Care Board to expedite their implementation. My securing of £5million in the recent October monitoring round will hasten this process.

Addiction: Alcohol and Drugs

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his Department's policy on the in-patient care of people with addictions to legal or illegal drugs or alcohol.
(AQW 5410/11-15)

Mr Poots: DHSSPS leads on the cross-departmental strategy to reduce the harm related to alcohol and drug misuse on Northern Ireland, known as the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs (NSD). Approximately £8 million is allocated to its implementation each year, and additional funding is provided through the mental health budget for the provision of treatment and support services. The NSD seeks to direct action across five pillars: prevention and early intervention; harm reduction; treatment and support; law and criminal justice; and monitoring, evaluation and research.

The NSD commits the health service to providing a four-tier model of prevention, early intervention and treatment and support – including, where necessary, in-patient treatment. The NSD is currently being revised and updated, and following on from the Review of Public Administration, is seeking to bring greater consistency to the services available across Northern Ireland. The Department has therefore tasked the Health and Social Services Board and the Public Health Agency with developing a regional commissioning framework for addiction services across Northern Ireland.

This work is looking at delivering the best possible outcomes for those suffering from addiction, and will consider all drug and alcohol 'treatment' services, within both community and in-patient settings and taking account of both the statutory and non-statutory/independent sectors.

The HSCB and the PHA have advised that the work is likely to be completed by the end of this year – the exact timescale will depend on the nature of any decision and the need for consultation. Following this, it is envisaged that, subject to the Department's agreement on the proposed way forward, implementation could begin in late 2011/early 2012.

Causeway Hospital: Dermatology Waiting Times

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why patients are being advised that they must wait 70 weeks for an appointment with a consultant at the Dermatology Department of the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine.
(AQW 5430/11-15)

Mr Poots: The longest wait for patients to see a Consultant Dermatologist at Causeway Hospital at 30th September 2011, the most recent quarter for which official statistics are available, was 55 weeks. Patients joining the waiting list are advised of the waiting time and are given a date indicating when they can expect their appointment to be carried out. The high number of red flag referrals, (suspected cancer) to this specialty means that more patients need to be given priority and has led to an increase in waiting times for patients accessing this service.

Residential and Foster Care

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 4091/11-15, to outline the reasons for the disparity in the spend within each Health and Social Care Trust on Residential Care and Foster Care, including kinship costs; and what is his Department doing to encourage a method of care that improves outcomes for children
(AQW 5431/11-15)

Mr Poots: All Health and Social Care Trusts have a range of for looked after children, which is required to meet the distinct needs of those children. Some require to be looked after in residential settings, for others, foster care, either kinship or non-kinship, is more suited to their needs. The majority of children are looked after in foster care settings care. Residential care by its nature is more costly to provide.

Cost of provision is different across Trusts for a number of reasons. For example, the numbers of children in care in each Trust is different as is care provision in each Trust to reflect the needs of children in the Trust's area. Some care packages are provided to children and young people with very complex needs. Also, some Trusts provide specialist placements to other Trusts, including secure and intensive support placements.

Through the Regional Adoption and Fostering Taskforce, the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and Trusts are actively involved in the promotion of a model of foster care, which matches the needs of children entering the care system. A strategy for residential care is also being developed by the HSCB.

The cross-departmental strategy for children in care, Care Matters in Northern Ireland, continues to be implemented. The strategy outlines the Executive's vision for wide ranging improvements in services to children and young people in and on the edge of care.

Enniskillen Hospital

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the level of public consultation that has taken place in relation to choosing a name for the new hospital in Enniskillen; (ii) when a decision on the name will be made; (iii) what names are currently under consideration; and (iv) who will make the final decision.
(AQW 5469/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) Consultation was undertaken in relation to choosing a name for the hospital by means of a naming competition organized by the Western Trust. As well as staff involved in the development of the new hospital, members of established forums, made up of staff and community representatives, were invited to submit entries for the new name.

(ii) I will make the final decision on the name for the new hospital in the near future.

(iii) The names provided by the Trust as a result of competition are currently under consideration.

(iv) I will make the final decision.

Health and Well-being

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he intends to develop a men's health and well-being policy, to include healthcare targets, the promotion of mental health, human rights awareness, parenting education and family support services.
(AQW 5497/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have no plans at present to develop a specific men's health and well-being policy.

My Department's health promotion strategies are designed to address lifestyle issues rather than gender-specific conditions or specific diseases. However, a number of health promotion strategies are in place, or in development, which, whilst not gender-specific, contain strategic actions aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of men. This includes strategies to tackle smoking, suicide and self harm, mental health, sexual health and obesity.

In addition, there are a wide range of programmes and initiatives in place in the statutory and voluntary/community sectors which address specific lifestyle and health risks for men. These include: the Men's Health Forum Ireland, which seeks to identify the key concerns relating to men's health and to increase understanding of these issues; the "Man Van" which brings health checks and life-saving messages to men in rural areas; and local men's groups which address physical and mental health issues.

The vital role fathers play in ensuring their children meet their full potential and the positive benefits to children and society of involved fathers is recognised in my Department's strategy – Families Matter. Kick Start is a specific initiative supported under Families Matter which provides training, support, networking and practical actions to organisations to enable them to engage and work with fathers in supporting them in the role they play in their child's life.

Adoption

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the criteria used by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to determine the suitability of people seeking to adopt children.
(AQW 5558/11-15)

Mr Poots: All Health and Social Care Trusts are required to comply with the duties under Regulation 8 of The Adoption Agencies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1989 (the 1989 Regulation) when considering whether a person may be suitable to be an adoptive parent. In making determinations about suitability, the Trust is also guided by the Adoption and Permanence Form, developed by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering.

In addition to the requirements of the 1989 Regulations, the Trust will obtain: a written reference from a member of the extended family; employer(s) references if the prospective adopter is or has been employed in a child care capacity or with vulnerable adults; and enhanced disclosure certificates in respect of the prospective adopter(s) and each member of the household aged 10 and over.

Pursuant to Regulation 11 of the Adoption Agencies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1989, the Trust makes a decision on the applicant's/applicants' suitability, having taken into account the recommendation of the Adoption Panel.

Autistic Spectrum Disorder

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current number of children and adults who are registered as having an autistic spectrum disorder, broken down by those aged (i) up to 10; (ii) 11 - 20; (iii) 21 to 30; (iv) 31 to 40; and (v) 41 to 50.
(AQW 5571/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information you have requested is not available centrally within my Department, or from Health and Social Care Trusts. I believe my Ministerial colleague in the Department of Education is providing you with figures relating to the numbers of pupils recorded by their schools as having Autistic Spectrum Disorder (AQW 5569/11-15).

The Autism Act which took effect from 9 August 2011 requires that the DHSSPS leads on a cross Departmental Autism Strategy, to be published within two years and reported on to the Assembly every three years, with other Departments statutorily obliged to cooperate. The Act also requires the DHSSPS to request every HSC Trust to provide data on the prevalence of Autism in its area in order that the Strategy can be published and updated, and that Northern Ireland Departments can effectively implement the Strategy.

In order to take forward this work a cross Departmental Prevalence of Autism Sub-Group has recently been established to research and explore existing data sources, with Health and Social Care and Education to determine whether and how these sources can be deployed for the purposes of the Autism Strategy. The Sub-Group will also determine what additional arrangements may need to be put in place to capture data on the prevalence of Autism in the Adult population.

Women and Children's Hospital

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the proposed Women's and Children's Hospital at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast
(AQW 5573/11-15)

Mr Poots: Following a recent review of the usage of the top three floors of the new Critical Care building on the Royal hospitals site, the top 3 floors of that building will house post natal beds and maternity outpatients. Together with a new maternity building, linked to the Critical Care building, this will be the new Women's hospital. Construction of the Critical Care building is currently ongoing and is due to be completed in 2012 and the new Maternity building will be completed in 2014.

The Children's hospital will be delivered as a separate project and, as a first step in the process, I have asked the Belfast Trust to complete a Strategic Outline Case, outlining the options for delivery of this much needed project.

Northern Health and Social Care Trust: Payment of Invoices

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the target time for the payment of invoices to small businesses by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust; (ii) whether he is aware of any delays in meeting these targets; and (iii) what action has been taken to ensure that delays do not occur.
(AQW 5626/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) The target time for the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) is the same as that for all HSC bodies. To comply with the Late Payment of Commercial Debts Regulations 2002, all invoices are required to be paid within agreed terms or if no terms have been agreed, within 30 days of the receipt of goods or a valid invoice (whichever is later). This is the requirement for paying invoices to all businesses, not just small businesses. There is a best practice target of ensuring that 95% of invoices are paid within these terms.

In addition, DFP has issued guidance seeking as many payments as possible to be made within 10 days. The Department and all its arms length bodies are aware of this commitment and make every effort to comply with this additional target.

(ii) Details of payment performance for the NHSCT is as follows:

Northern HSC Trust – Percentage of payments made within 30 days

2010-11 financial year	1 April 2011 to 30 October 2011
95.6%	94.3%

(iii) DHSSPS has issued guidance to all of its Arms Length Bodies advising of the requirement to pay invoices within 30 days or agreed payment terms and prompt payment performance is reported to my Department on a monthly basis. The Northern HSC Trust also seeks to ensure compliance by:
(a) circulating the DHSSPS prompt payment guidance to Trust staff;
(b) monitoring prompt payment performance;
(c) proactively resolving payment queries/disputes; and
(d) Internal audit reviewing Trust compliance with the guidance.

Pregnancy: Guidance on Termination

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the Guidance on the Termination of Pregnancy will require clearance from the Executive before it comes into force.
(AQW 5663/11-15)

Mr Poots: I can confirm that it is my intention to bring my Department's Guidance on the Termination of Pregnancy before my Executive colleagues prior to it being issued to health professionals.

Winter Fuel Payment: Cancer Patients

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why cancer patients calling the Winter Fuel Payment Helpline cannot establish their eligibility for February's top-up payment by giving their name and National Insurance number.
(AQW 5728/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Winter Fuel Payment scheme is a scheme administered by the Department of Social Development to help older people keep warm during winter. This is separate to the recent announcement by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister of a one-off NI Executive funded Fuel Allowance Initiative under the Social Protection Fund.

All cancer patients who are eligible to receive the Fuel Allowance Initiative will be identified and contacted on an individual basis by the relevant HSC Trust treating them. No application is necessary. My officials are currently liaising with Trusts on the arrangements necessary to enable this payment to be made to eligible patients by 28 February 2012.

Department of Justice

Robert Black

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline the rationale for chartering a private plane to transport Robert Black to and from trial; and whether this is the normal mode of transporting prisoners into this jurisdiction.
(AQW 5161/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) was responsible for the transportation of Robert Black for trial and as such the rationale for chartering a private plane on this occasion is a matter for NOMS. The normal mode of transporting prisoners into this jurisdiction is escort by prison staff on ordinary scheduled flights or sea ferries.

Prisoners: Drug Debts

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) whether prison funds have been spent on the payment of prisoners' drug debts; and if so, how much has been paid out in each of the last 10 years; and (ii) to how many individuals' debt these payments relate.
(AQW 5315/11-15)

Mr Ford: A claim that money earned by a prisoner was used to pay off an alleged drug debt in 2008 emerged during an internal Northern Ireland Prison Service investigation into the Prisoner Assessment Unit. The allegation was thoroughly investigated.

The report found that in respect of one prisoner a case management discussion concluded that an outstanding £300 debt, allegedly relating to drugs, was a stumbling block to the prisoner s successful rehabilitation. The prisoner undertook to save £40.00 per week from his weekly earnings. £300 was then passed on to a relative.

The report concluded that at no time were NIPS staff in contact with anyone connected with the debt. It also concluded that NIPS staff who had agreed this arrangement with the prisoner had acted inappropriately. These members of staff have since been subject to disciplinary procedures.

Other than this single event NIPS is not aware of any other occasions when prisoners have used their weekly earnings to pay off a drug debt.

Shared Future

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Justice (i) to outline the measures he has taken since coming into office. or plans to take, to promote a shared future; and (ii) whether he will consider implementing a policy appraisal whereby his Department will screen and policy-proof all policies and spending decisions for impact on good relations and the creation of a shared future.
(AQW 5363/11-15)

Mr Ford: The promotion of a shared future is a fundamental priority for me, and building safer, shared communities is at the heart of my reform agenda for the justice system. The Community Safety Strategy, which will be published in the New Year, will set out my vision for justice in a shared future, with an ambitious set of proposals around improving community safety at interfaces, working with communities to remove or reconfigure interfaces and tackling hate crime.

Interface barriers are an obstacle to a shared society. My Department is engaging with community groups and statutory agencies to identify opportunities for changing, or removing, interface barriers, and, where support exists, assisting in making change possible.

The Executive's draft Programme for Government has, as a key commitment, the need to "actively seek local agreement to reduce the number of peace walls". As part of this work I will be establishing an inter agency group to deal with issues of safety and security around interfaces, and identify funding opportunities that can be used to support communities who want see change and build a shared future.

In addition the Justice Act 2011 was designed to enhance community and public safety and provide beneficial impacts for all in Northern Ireland, including all "Section 75" groups. The community engagement, public safety and sports law provisions of the Bill tackle problems with behaviour, violence and sectarianism.

My Department also has an active Diversity Steering Group which is chaired by a Board Level Champion and has representation from across the Department and its Agencies. The Group has put in place a Diversity Framework and Action Plan, creating strong links between diversity and DOJ business priorities. The plan also has a significant emphasis on internal and external engagement, which is evidenced through a series of staff events and the Department having stands at both Belfast Pride and Mela festivals in 2011.

Four Staff Network Groups have been established within the Department and they also play a key role in progressing the Diversity Agenda:

- Black & Ethnic Minority (BEM);
- Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgender (LGBT);
- Carers; and
- Disability.

They also assist policy makers within the Department to develop equitable policies and procedures as well as providing confidential advice and support to colleagues and line managers. The network groups have supported other Departments in establishing similar structures and have strong relationships in place with external organisations such as Rainbow and Artsekta.

I commissioned a comprehensive review of prisons in Northern Ireland, the report of which identified differentials in outcomes for various groups of prisoners within the prison system. In response to this finding new procedures have been introduced to ensure more effective monitoring, reporting and where necessary, corrective action.

Under the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Department is required to fulfil the statutory duty to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. In this regard, my Department is required to consider how all policy development and spending decisions contribute to promoting good relations.

In addition to its statutory duty the Department has introduced a number of initiatives to further promote good relations. This includes the appointment of an Equality and Good Relations Champion at Senior Civil Service level and the establishment of an Equality and Good Relations Forum to lead and drive the Department's equality agenda.

An Equality Action Plan has been developed which includes a commitment to develop a Statement of Commitment to Good Relations.

My Department has also submitted an Equality Scheme to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) for its approval and has introduced a new screening template, as recommended by ECNI's guidance, which includes a specific section on how policies are likely to impact on good relations.

I am currently discussing with the Minister for Employment and Learning options to strengthen this aspect of policy screening to ensure that all policies and spending decisions are examined for their potential impact on good relations and the creation of a shared future.

DOJ: Construction Work Payments

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Justice what proportion of invoices for construction work have been paid on time by his Department and its arm's length bodies, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 5377/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice came into existence on 12th April 2010. Details of expenditure before that date are a matter for the previous department.

The Department and its arm's length bodies record payment performance statistics based on the total number of invoices processed, and not by the expenditure type.

In the 2010/11 financial year, 89% of all invoices processed were paid within the target time of 10 working days.

Legal Aid: Interpreter Services

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how much has been spent from the legal aid budget on interpreter services in each of the last three years, broken down by court division.
(AQW 5446/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information cannot be provided in the format requested as the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission does not record details of interpreters' payments by court division and interpreters' fees are not recorded separately in cases that are

assessed by the Taxing Master. The table below sets out the available information by court tier. The information provided includes fees paid in respect of language, deafness and Braille interpreters.

Summary of Interpreters Expenses

Legal Aid Scheme	Court Tier	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
LAA	Advice Only	£27,557.32	£22,444.66	£20,029.95
ABWOR	Magistrates' Court	£1,270.64	£1,945.56	£1,469.84
Children Order	Family Proceedings Court	£560.86	£3,847.07	£5,655.19
Civil	County Court	£323.50	£185.73	£226.50
	Court of Judicature of Northern Ireland	£4,728.68	£4,871.23	£10,014.01
	Family Care Centre	£2,060.04	£861.60	£5,278.16
	Magistrates' Court	-	-	£3,634.74
Civil	Nationality, Immigration & Asylum	£13,173.06	£11,464.35	£10,281.88
Criminal	County Court Appeals	£132.19	£2,390.51	£7,256.78
	Crown Court	£9,658.49	£52,676.65	£86,831.47
	Magistrates' Court	£8,864.55	£47,941.63	£87,225.00
	Total	**£68,329.33**	**£148,628.99**	**£237,903.52**

Eamon Coyle

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what caused the collapse of the first trial of Eamon Coyle; and to detail the cost of each of his trials, including legal aid.
(AQW 5448/11-15)

Mr Ford: The first Crown Court trial of Eamon Coyle was aborted because an issue arose in relation to the CCTV evidence.

A second Crown Court trial was held between 9 and 15 September 2010.

It is not possible to detail the costs associated with each trial separately. The table below sets out the total estimated costs associated with both Crown Court trials where those costs can be identified.

Cost Type	Estimated Cost
PSNI Prosecution	Not Available[1]
PPS Prosecution	Not Available[2]
Defence (Legal Aid Costs)	£109,217.37
Court: Judiciary, Staff	£17,995.50
Jury Costs	£4,036.05
Facilities (eg Courtroom Accommodation)	£1,885.00
Total	**£133,133.92**

1 PSNI have advised that it is not possible to attribute costs to this investigation accurately without incurring disproportionate costs.

2 No payments have been paid to date to prosecuting counsel for both trials, however counsel's fee note is under active consideration.

Prisoners: Specialist Assessment Outside Northern Ireland

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many times prisoners have been transported outside Northern Ireland to receive specialist medical or psychological assessments, prior to being considered for parole or release, in the last ten years.
(AQW 5449/11-15)

Mr Ford: None.

Prisons: Stand-by Search Teams

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice how many stand-by search teams exist in each prison; and how this compares with each of the last five years.
(AQW 5456/11-15)

Mr Ford: Currently there is only one stand-by search team; this is in operation within Maghaberry Prison and has been in place for the last five years.

Magilligan Prison has not had a stand-by search team in the past five years and Hydebank Wood Prison and Young Offenders Centre only had a search team between 2006 and 2008.

Social Networks: Bullying and Abuse

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what legislation his Department can introduce to protect children from bullying and abuse on social networks.
(AQW 5478/11-15)

Mr Ford: Harassment is already an offence under Northern Ireland law. The Protection of Harassment (NI) Order 1997 allows prosecutions to be brought for the general offence of harassment; for putting someone in fear of violence; and for the breach of an injunction or restraining order. Maximum penalties are two years; 7 years; and five years respectively.

My officials are exploring with officials within the Scottish Government their recent experience of introducing an offence that included use of the internet, email, or electronic communication. They are also exploring with PSNI and PPS how modern forms of bullying might be dealt with either legislatively or operationally.

Prison Service Staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many Prison Service staff are waiting to be placed on special duties for medical reasons.
(AQW 5511/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are currently no Prison Service staff who are waiting to be placed on special duties for medical reasons.

Unpaid Fines: Warrants

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many money warrants are currently outstanding for unpaid fines in each court division.
(AQW 5512/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below sets out the number of outstanding money warrants1 as at 2 December 2011, broken down by County Court Division.

Division	Number Outstanding
Antrim	3517
Ards	3258
Armagh And South Down	2667
Belfast	17126
Craigavon	3221
Fermanagh And Tyrone	5539
Londonderry	3617
Total	**38945**

1 Money warrants includes warrants that may also have been issued against unpaid compensation or costs.

The Department of Justice, Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service and the Police Service of Northern Ireland continue to work together to develop mechanisms to reduce the number of outstanding warrants. In terms of wider work on fine enforcement for the future, a consultation exercise on fine enforcement concluded on 14 November 2011. Consultee responses are currently being analysed and my officials are due to report to the Justice Committee about proposals for the way forward in the New Year.

Access to Justice Review

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 4729/11-15, whether he will make a statement on this matter.
(AQW 5521/11-15)

Mr Ford: My response to AQW4729/11-15 advised that the final report of the Access to Justice Review was published for public consultation on 13 September. When I have received and considered all the responses to the consultation I will make a statement to the Assembly setting out my formal response to the Review.

Legal Aid: Dispute

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice, following the end of the legal aid dispute, what he expects the legal aid budget to be for 2012/13.
(AQW 5527/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Resource Departmental Expenditure Limits budget of the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission for 2012/13 is £83.1m. (This is the ringfenced or "cash" element of the budget).

In addition, the Department of Justice intends to access additional funding made available from HM Treasury's Reserve as part of the financial package agreed on the devolution of justice.

Any unfunded pressure arising in 2012/13 will be accommodated from within the Department's ringfenced budget settlement and managed through the in-year monitoring process.

Prison Officers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to detail the ratio of prison officer to prisoner, excluding class officers, on duty on a wing during a shift at each prison.
(AQW 5532/11-15)

Mr Ford: Excluding Class Officers a snapshot of staff to prisoner ratios on 7/8 December 2011 is:

Maghaberry	Hydebank Wood	Magilligan
Ratio 1:18.9	Ratio 1:13.8	Ratio 1:23.8

Loughgall Police Station: Historical Enquiries Team Report

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice, when the Historical Enquiries Team reports that the security forces were justified in their action in response to the IRA attack on Loughgall Police Station in 1987, as has been reported in the media, whether he will liaise with the Northern Ireland Office to ensure that the famililes of the IRA personnel who engaged in the attack pay back any compensation they received.
(AQW 5536/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Historical Enquiries Team report that the question refers to has not yet been published. I will only consider what, if any, action would appropriately fall to me once it has been published.

Youth Magistrates' Courts

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of (i) males; and (ii) females who were convicted in youth magistrates' courts in each of the last three years, broken down by court division.
(AQW 5587/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below gives the number of males and females convicted at youth court for the calendar years 2006 to 2008 (the latest year for which figures are currently available).

Number of males and females convicted at youth court by court division 2006

Court division	Males	Females
Antrim	161	23
Ards	175	23
Armagh and South Down	43	16
Belfast	341	31
Craigavon and Lisburn	122	32
Fermanagh and Tyrone	112	15
Londonderry	163	31
Total	**1117**	**171**

Number of males and females convicted at youth court by court division 2007

Court division	Males	Females
Antrim	223	43
Ards	189	40
Armagh and South Down	75	18
Belfast	338	34
Craigavon and Lisburn	170	29
Fermanagh and Tyrone	135	13
Londonderry	146	20
Total	**1276**	**197**

Number of males and females convicted at youth court by court division 2008

Court division	Males	Females
Antrim	121	16
Ards	178	34
Armagh and South Down	115	15
Belfast	294	35
Craigavon and Lisburn	142	20
Fermanagh and Tyrone	150	11
Londonderry	93	13
Total	**1093**	**144**

Data for 2006 should not be directly compared with data from 2007 to 2008 as the data sets are sourced from different systems.

Enniskillen Court House: Double Yellow Lines

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how much it cost to have double yellow lines painted and then removed from outside Enniskillen Court House, East Bridge Street, Enniskillen.
(AQW 5589/11-15)

Mr Ford: The cost of painting double yellow lines outside Enniskillen Courthouse and their subsequent removal is estimated at £4,300.

Counterfeit Goods: Convictions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many convictions have been secured for the possession and sale of counterfeit goods in each of the last three years, broken down by court division.
(AQW 5594/11-15)

Mr Ford: Possession and sale of counterfeit goods may be prosecuted under the Trade Marks Act 1994 or the Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988.

The table below gives the number of convictions for the sale and possession of counterfeit goods for the calendar years 2006 to 2008 (the latest year for which figures are currently available). This does not cover currency forgery offences.

Number of convictions for sale or possession of counterfeit goods by court division, 2006-2008

Court division	2006	2007	2008
Antrim	5	3	3
Ards	6	11	3
Armagh and South Down	7	6	4
Belfast	9	20	8

Court division	2006	2007	2008
Craigavon and Lisburn	2	3	5
Fermanagh and Tyrone	6	13	5
Londonderry	2	10	6
Total	**37**	**66**	**47**

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Data for 2006 should not be directly compared with data from 2007 to 2008 as the data sets are sourced from different systems.

Small Claims Applications

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what grade of civil servants check small claims application forms.
(AQW 5619/11-15)

Mr Ford: All small claims applications, entered online or completed manually, are processed by an Administrative Officer (AO) and checked by an Executive Officer (EO).

Any query raised during this initial checking process may be dealt with by the EO, if it relates to an administrative issue, or referred to the Chief Clerk or the District Judge (Civil) for consideration and direction as appropriate. Administrative staff do not make any assessment of the facts of the claim as this is a judicial matter.

Further management monitoring arrangements are in place at various stages in the application process to ensure that documentation is prepared accurately and sent to the parties; that returned documents are correctly allocated to applications; and that time-limits and targets are adhered to.

All decrees are quality assured by an EO before issue.

In addition, approximately 20% of all applications are subject to random review by an EO during the stages of the small claims process.

Small Claims Applications

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what quality control or monitoring arrangements are in place for the processing of small claims applications to ensure that these claims are properly processed.
(AQW 5620/11-15)

Mr Ford: All small claims applications, entered online or completed manually, are processed by an Administrative Officer (AO) and checked by an Executive Officer (EO).

Any query raised during this initial checking process may be dealt with by the EO, if it relates to an administrative issue, or referred to the Chief Clerk or the District Judge (Civil) for consideration and direction as appropriate. Administrative staff do not make any assessment of the facts of the claim as this is a judicial matter.

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In addition, approximately 20% of all applications are subject to random review by an EO during the stages of the small claims process.

Criminal Justice

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Justice what action he intends to take to facilitate increased cooperation between the criminal justice agencies, through initiatives similar to the Criminal Justice Delivery Group.
(AQW 5627/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are a number of arrangements already in place to strengthen and maintain co-operation across the criminal justice system. In addition to the Criminal Justice Delivery Group, which I chair, the Criminal Justice Board meets monthly to consider the strategic priorities for the criminal justice system. The Criminal Justice Issues Group also meets several times a year - chaired by Lord Justice Higgins, this group is representative of all sectors of the criminal justice system and the various tiers of the judiciary, and works to provide an inter-agency contribution to the operational effectiveness of the system. It includes representatives from the voluntary and community sector.

There are, too, a number of sub-groups of the Criminal Justice Board which meet periodically to examine particular issues such as victims and witnesses, mental health and fine enforcement which are further examples of collaborative working. I also meet

regularly with the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Lord Chief Justice and the Attorney General; when necessary, additional meetings are arranged to discuss significant issues.

In addition to these various fora, I have in place a number of initiatives to promote joined up working, including a multi agency programme of work to speed up the progress of criminal cases.

The introduction of the Causeway information system has also facilitated cooperation between the criminal justice agencies, by allowing the main organisations to share information electronically. This has significantly improved the joining-up of the system at an operational level.

Domestic Violence

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the current situation with regard to (i) Independent Domestic Violence Advisors; and (ii) Domestic Violence Protection Orders; and what action his Department is taking on these areas.
(AQW 5628/11-15)

Mr Ford: The provision of an Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA) service is being taken forward by way of a procurement exercise by the funding agencies (Department of Justice, Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety, and the Police Service for Northern Ireland).

The Home Office is currently piloting Domestic Violence Protection Orders. The pilot will be evaluated in summer 2012. Thereafter, my Department will assess the appropriateness of introducing DVPOs in Northern Ireland taking account of any necessary legislative changes required.

Children: Cruelty or Neglect

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many convictions have been secured for cruelty to or neglect of children in each of the last three years, broken down by court division.
(AQW 5649/11-15)

Mr Ford: Cruelty to and neglect of children may be prosecuted under the Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1968, the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 or Section 9(1) of the Summary Jurisdiction (Ireland) Act 1908.

The table below gives the number of convictions for cruelty to and neglect of children for the calendar years 2006 to 2008 (the latest year for which figures are currently available).

Number of convictions cruelty to and neglect of children by court division, 2006-2008

Court division	2006	2007	2008
Antrim	1	1	5
Ards		2	4
Armagh and South Down			3
Belfast	3	5	3
Craigavon and Lisburn		1	1
Fermanagh and Tyrone		1	2
Londonderry		1	
Total	**4**	**11**	**18**

Data for 2006 should not be directly compared with data from 2007 to 2008 as the data sets are sourced from different systems.

Counterfeit Clothing

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether seized counterfeit clothing, which has resulted in prosecution and conviction, can be donated to charities for non-sale and distribution to people in need, in this jurisdiction and abroad.
(AQW 5650/11-15)

Mr Ford: The donation of seized counterfeit clothing to charities is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Policing Board.

You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Firearms Licences

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice how many firearms licences are valid at present; and how this figures compares to that of five years ago.
(AQW 5668/11-15)

Mr Ford: The operation of firearms licensing is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and role of the Policing Board.

You may therefore wish to direct your question to the PSNI.

Firearms Licences

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to outline the process following the termination of a firearms licence, including whether the firearms are disposed of, or valued and re-sold through a single dealer or a variety of dealers; and whether this process has changed in the last ten years, and if so, when.
(AQW 5669/11-15)

Mr Ford: Article 10 of the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004 (2004 No. 702 (NI 3)) deals with the consequences of the revocation of a firearm certificate. The process is also referred to in the Guidance on Northern Ireland Firearms Controls which supports the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004. The relevantError! Hyperlink reference not valid. extract is set out below.

The practical application of this part of the legislation is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

Extract from the Guidance on Northern Ireland Firearms Controls

Article 10

Consequences of revocation

1 When the Chief Constable revokes or partially revokes a certificate he must send the holder notice in writing requiring him to surrender his certificate and the relevant firearms and ammunition either –

(a) within 21 days of the date of the notice in the case of revocation or partial revocation under Article 9; or

(b) such period as may be specified in the notice in the case of revocation or partial revocation under Article 12(2) (prohibited weapons).

A certificate holder who fails to comply with such a notice is guilty of an offence.

2 Normally, a notice will be served by means of the recorded delivery system, although there may be occasions when personal service is more practicable. Should the person wish to discuss the matter, he should contact the local firearms enquiry officer.

3 Where a certificate is revoked or partially revoked the Chief Constable may by written notice require the holder to dispose of the relevant firearm and ammunition within the period specified in the notice.

4 If the certificate holder appeals under Article 74 against the revocation or partial revocation the disposal notice shall not apply unless the appeal is abandoned or dismissed. In that event the notice will have effect with the date of the abandonment or dismissal of the appeal substituted for the original date of the notice.

5 `If the holder does not comply with the disposal notice within the period specified in it, or modified period as described in paragraph 4, or within whatever further time as the Chief Constable may, in special circumstances, allow, the Chief Constable may order the destruction or disposal of the relevant firearms or ammunition. Wherever possible he will do so in a manner agreed with the owner.

6 If the appeal is successful the relevant firearms and ammunition should be returned to the owner as soon as possible after the decision is made.

Peace Walls

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Justice whether he is seeking local agreement to reduce the number of peace walls.
(AQW 5754/11-15)

Mr Ford: As I explained to the Assembly on 13 December (AQO 1020/11-15) community views are critical to discussions to reduce the number of interface structures across Northern Ireland. The commitment in the Executive's draft Programme for Government is to "actively seek local agreement to reduce the number of peace walls". We are witnessing constructive engagement between local communities, Government and a number of organisations in addressing this issue in a number of areas and I am determined that will continue.

Youth Convictions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many youth convictions of (i) males; and (ii) females progressed to Crown Court hearings in each of the last three years, broken down by court division.
(AQW 5774/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below gives the number of youth (17 years and under) convictions at Crown Court for the calendar years 2006 to 2008 (the latest year for which figures are currently available).

No females aged 17 years or under were prosecuted at Crown Court during this period.

Number of youth (males aged 17 years and under) convictions at Crown Court by court division, 2006-2008

Court division	2006	2007	2008
Antrim	0	5	3
Ards	1	2	3
Armagh and South Down	0	1	0
Belfast	12	8	7
Craigavon and Lisburn	2	2	4
Fermanagh and Tyrone	1	1	2
Londonderry	5	1	1
Total	**21**	**20**	**20**

Data for 2006 should not be directly compared with data from 2007 to 2008 as the data sets are sourced from different systems.

Police: Retired Officers

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Justice to comment on the pattern of retired police officers being rehired.
(AQO 1019/11-15)

Mr Ford: The recruitment of staff to the Police Service of Northern Ireland is a matter for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Policing Board. I am committed to respecting the operational independence of the Chief Constable and the role of the Board. It would therefore be inappropriate for me to comment on this issue.

Antisocial Behaviour

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Justice what work his Department has done to establish an accurate record of the number of people affected by anti-social behaviour each year.
(AQO 1025/11-15)

Mr Ford: Building safer communities by preventing anti-social behaviour and reducing the harm it causes to communities is a top priority for my Department and the wider Executive, as set out in the draft Programme for Government.

I will publish a new Community Safety Strategy early in the New Year, setting out proposals to address anti-social behaviour through working in greater partnership regionally and locally. These proposals will build on our approach to date of a graduated response of prevention, intervention and enforcement where necessary.

Members will be aware that this approach has contributed to a reduction of over 20% in anti-social behaviour incidents since 2008, and long term trends as measured by the Northern Ireland Crime Survey show that fewer people think that anti-social behaviour is a big problem in their area.

It is worth noting that the preventative approach was endorsed during the public consultation on the Strategy, with enforcement seen as a last resort; indeed there were no compelling arguments in support of additional powers, including dispersal powers. I can therefore confirm that at this time I have no plans to extend the PSNI's powers of dispersal.

Measuring our success in preventing anti-social behaviour, given the subjective nature and quality of life impact that it has, requires us to look beyond the number of incidents and consider the impact on people's quality of life and confidence in the justice agencies. The new Community Safety Strategy will include a range of indicators to measure the impact of our actions to address anti-social behaviour and the outcomes we wish to achieve.

Finally the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland has commenced an inspection of the criminal justice system's approach to addressing anti-social behaviour with a view to publishing a final report in Spring 2012.

I will await the outcome of the inspection and consider any recommendations arising from it.

Prisons: Retired Officers

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of Justice what safeguards he will put in place to prevent retiring prison officers from being rehired under the proposed prison reforms.
(AQO 1028/11-15)

Mr Ford: Recruitment to the Northern Ireland Prison Service is governed by the Civil Service Commissioner's Recruitment Code and all appointments are made strictly on merit following open competition. It would not be legal to prevent any individual or grouping from seeking employment because of a previous occupation. However, should a former member of staff be appointed on merit, normal rules of abatement would be applicable.

Prison Review

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the progress being made in response to the recommendations made by the Prisons Review Team.
(AQO 1031/11-15)

Mr Ford: I recognise the pressing need for reform and the urgent need to make swift progress against implementation of the recommendations made by the Prison Review Team.

Work to implement these recommendations has started, and my officials are in the process of developing a detailed implementation plan. Good progress is being made across a number of fronts, for example:

- I have met with the First Minister and deputy First Minister to discuss how best the Executive as a whole can work together to oversee and implement cross-Departmental recommendations;
- I have met with the Health Minister in relation to the report and my officials are working closely with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in response to those recommendations in the report that relate to Healthcare;
- the NIPS staff Exit Scheme was launched on 8 November, paving the way for further structural and cultural reforms; all eligible staff have now replied, and personal illustrations of benefits payable, will be issued by 20 January. Staff will be asked to register their intent to apply for the scheme by 17 February 2012.
- in November, I opened the Donard Day Centre at Maghaberry which is transforming how NIPS manages, supports and cares for the most vulnerable of prisoners;
- work on radical changes to Healthcare is well advanced, including the transfer of Healthcare staff to the South Eastern Trust by April 2012;
- a number of reviews of the provision of non-core functions, such as Learning and Skills, Catering and Estate Management are either underway or have been completed;
- work on a revised Prison Estate Strategy which will set out how the Prison Estate will be developed, taking account of the recommendations within the Review Team's report is well underway; and
- detailed work is continuing with regard to the development of a new Business Operating Model which will radically transform how prisons operate on a day to day basis.

I share the view of the Prison Review Team that this work needs to be overseen at the highest level. Work is underway to establish an oversight committee, to be chaired by me, to monitor progress against the Review Team's recommendations. I expect to make an announcement about the role and make-up of this committee later this month.

Crime: Older and Vulnerable People

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice following the recent debate and vote on crimes against older and vulnerable people will he seek Executive approval for a sentencing framework that reflects the will of the Assembly.
(AQO 1032/11-15)

Mr Ford: Sentencing in the individual case is a matter for the judiciary. In making sentencing decisions, the judiciary are guided by sentencing guidelines, which indicate that courts should treat the age and vulnerability of the victim as an aggravating factor when assessing the appropriate sentence to be imposed. I consider it important that the discretion of the judiciary in such cases should be maintained.

The Lord Chief Justice has recently announced a priority list of areas where sentencing guidance for the judiciary will be developed. The principles underlying sentencing, expressed in this guidance, will include attacks on vulnerable people, including older people, as an aggravating factor in sentencing decisions.

Under the Programme for Government my Department is committed to tackling crime and fear of crime against older and vulnerable people, which will be part of the Community Safety Strategy to be published in the New Year. Alongside this work, I am currently considering a range of potential mechanisms by which greater transparency, consistency and understanding of sentencing practice might be delivered in a manner that will promote public confidence. I hope to announce proposals on the way forward in the near future.

Department for Regional Development

West Belfast: Spend by the Department for Regional Development

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his Department's, and its arm's-length bodies', spend in the West Belfast constituency in each of the last three years; and the proposed spend for each year until 2015.
(AQW 5227/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Neither my Department nor its arm's-length bodies, Northern Ireland Water (NIW) and Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company (NITHC), maintain detailed analysis of spend on a parliamentary constituency basis. However, where reasonable and without disproportionate cost, business areas have reviewed expenditure records to identify any key areas of spend in the West Belfast constituency. This information is set out below.

Roads Service

Roads Service maintains an analysis of its expenditure on a financial year basis by Council Area. The tables below detail the resource and capital expenditure in the financial years 2008-2009 to 2010-2011 in the Belfast City Council and Lisburn City Council areas.

	Resource Expenditure (£'000)		
Period	**Belfast City Council**	**Lisburn City Council**	**Total**
April 2008 – March 2009	13,976	7,704	21,680
April 2009 – March 2010	11,849	4,338	16,187
April 2010 – March 2011	12,862	4,726	17,588
Total	**38,687**	**16,768**	**55,455**

	Capital Expenditure (£'000)		
Period	**Belfast City Council**	**Lisburn City Council**	**Total**
April 2008 – March 2009	11,503	2,345	13,848
April 2009 – March 2010	10,475	5,228	15,703
April 2010 – March 2011	6,206	4,062	10,268
Total	**28,184**	**11,635**	**39,819**

Roads Service capital expenditure includes major capital schemes, minor capital schemes, street lighting renewal, land, capital structural maintenance and other capital activities.

Roads Service does not allocate resource or capital budgets for future years on either a District Council or Parliamentary constituency basis.

Roads Service maintenance expenditure is allocated on the basis of need using a range of weighted indicators tailored to each maintenance activity (i.e. resurfacing, patching, gully emptying, grass cutting etc). Divisions use these indicators when apportioning funding across council areas to ensure, as far as possible, an equitable distribution of funds across the whole of Northern Ireland.

The priority and advancement of the schemes within the major roads programme is determined by the Minister taking into account a broad range of criteria. Other capital works are prioritised on assessed need taking into account a range of criteria.

Northern Ireland Water (NIW)

Over the past 3 financial years NIW has invested around £79.3 million on major capital schemes which impact on the West Belfast constituency. Investment for each of the years is set out in the table below. Expenditure on minor capital projects and operating costs (resource expenditure) are not included as it could only be provided at disproportionate cost. These figures are approximate:

Period	**Major Capital Expenditure (£'000)**
April 2008 – March 2009	51,000
April 2009 – March 2010	23,000
April 2010 – March 2011	5,300
Total	**79,300**

The above figures include expenditure on the Belfast Sewers Project and Dunmurry Wastewater Treatment Works modifications.

As the annual plans for future years have not yet been finalised it is not possible to provide specific details of proposals for the West Belfast constituency area. However, subject to the availability of funds, work to the value of £18.2 million is currently planned. The proposed investment for each of these years is set out in the table below.

Period	**Major Capital Expenditure (£'000)**
April 2011 – March 2012	4,700
April 2012 – March 2013	9,000
April 2013 – March 2014	1,000
April 2014 – March 2015	3,500
Total	**18,200**

Transport – NITHC / Translink

The tables below detail the capital investment spent by Translink in the West Belfast constituency in each of the last three years and the proposed spend for each year until 2015. All the projects relate to the Falls Road Depot. These projects included spend on CCTV refurbishment and other security measures, improvements to the building conditions and other equipment.

Period	**Capital Expenditure (£'000)**
April 2008 – March 2009	143.5
April 2009 – March 2010	131.7
April 2010 – March 2011	7.0
Total	**282.2**

Period	**Proposed Capital Expenditure (£'000)**
April 2011 – March 2012	138.0
April 2012 – March 2013	6.0
April 2013 – March 2014	18.0
April 2014 – March 2015	274.0
Total	**436.0**

My Department has also invested in the purchase of new modern buses, some of which have been deployed in the West Belfast constituency. It is not possible to assign a specific sum to this investment.

Similarly, it is not possible to identify resource expenditure for public transport, as expenditure does not relate to an individual constituency.

Transport – Rapid Transit

As you are aware my Department is currently developing proposals for a pilot Belfast Rapid Transit system which will link West Belfast, East Belfast and Titanic Quarter with and through the city centre. The expenditure on the development of this project in the last three years and the budget for the development and initial commencement of the implementation of the project up to 2015 is set out in the tables below. These monies relate to the Belfast Rapid Transit project as a whole and it is not possible to identify specific spend in the West Belfast constituency. However, as the West Belfast rapid transit route (WWay) represents approximately 40% of the overall pilot network, it is reasonable to assume that approximately 40% of the total budget up to 2014/15 relates to the rapid transit project in West Belfast.

Period	**Expenditure (£'000)**
April 2008 – March 2009	60
April 2009 – March 2010	520
April 2010 – March 2011	110
Total	**690**

Period	Proposed Expenditure (£'000)
April 2011 – March 2012	390
April 2012 – March 2013	880
April 2013 – March 2014	1,560
April 2014 – March 2015	10,080
Total	**12,910**

Transport – Other

The Department has provided and will continue to provide funding for other public transport services and initiatives, including transport services for People with Disabilities, throughout Belfast, which although used by residents in the West Belfast constituency, are not specific to that constituency.

Sewers and Pumping Stations

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the unadopted sewers and pumping stations, with outstanding agreements with NI Water, in the North Down constituency which are under the control of receivers or administrators.
(AQW 5237/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that that there are currently some 322 existing agreements in place with persons constructing or proposing to construct a sewerage system which may be adopted at a future date provided the terms of the agreement have been met. This includes agreements formerly with its predecessor Water Service which transferred to NIW on 1 April 2007. NIW works closely with my Department's Road Service, which administers Departmental Bond procedures, in taking forward the adoption of streets and sewers for Water Service cases where a developer is no longer trading.

NIW has not been advised of any developments within the North Down Constituency which are subject to its enforcement procedures under the Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. NIW is aware of two development sites in the North Down area, reportedly in the hands of an administrator, that are being taken forward by Roads Service under the Private Streets (Northern Ireland) Order 1980 enforcement procedures. NIW is working with Roads Service to resolve any outstanding issues.

A5 Road Scheme

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to redirect unused money from the A5 road scheme to other road and footpath schemes.
(AQW 5242/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: You may be aware that the A5WTC project has been taken forward as a result of an agreement between the Executive and the Irish Government and, since the Irish Government has indicated it is unable to part fund the A5 and A8 projects as originally envisaged, this will undoubtedly affect the funding available to my Department.

Following receipt of the Inspector's report and comments from Roads Service, I intend to consider all issues, including the availability of funding, before making decisions in relation to the A5 project and the wider Strategic Roads Programme.

Shared Future

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to outline the measures he has taken since coming into office. or plans to take, to promote a shared future; and (ii) whether he will consider implementing a policy appraisal whereby his Department will screen and policy-proof all policies and spending decisions for the impact on good relations and the creation of a shared future.
(AQW 5243/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

(i) Under the Northern Ireland Act 1998, all departments are required to fulfil the statutory duty to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

My Department's work on the Regional Development Strategy and Regional Transportation Strategy will connect and support communities, strengthen community cohesion and promote city and town centres as shared spaces. In addition, Roads Service assists other agencies and communities to deal with flags, graffiti and illegal monuments in ways designed to best promote good relations.

(ii) As part of their obligations under the Act all departments are required to consider how all policy development and spending decisions contribute to promoting good relations. The approach to maintaining good relations considerations into policy development and resource allocation will also be considered as part of the development of the final Cohesion, Sharing and Integration strategy.

NI Water: Chief Executive

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the criteria that will be used to judge the performance of the Chief Executive of NI Water over the winter period.
(AQW 5255/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: While I will wish to be kept informed, it is a matter for the Northern Ireland Water Board's Remuneration Committee to develop the criteria that will be used to judge the performance of the Chief Executive over the winter period.

NI Water: Chief Executive

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development on what date an announcement will be made regarding the assessment of the performance of the Chief Executive of NI Water's over the winter period.
(AQW 5256/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: It is a matter for the Northern Ireland Water Board's Remuneration Committee to develop the criteria that will be used to judge the performance of the Chief Executive over the winter period. Therefore any decisions on the outcome of the Committee's assessment (including when and how to communicate the Committee's findings to stakeholders) will be a matter for the Board and will not be taken before March 2012.

NI Water: Chief Executive

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development why he indicated that he would require a satisfactory performance from the Chief Executive of NI Water over the winter period, rather than an exceptional performance.
(AQW 5257/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The reference to a satisfactory performance in the approved Northern Ireland Water (NIW) Board's proposed salary increase for the Chief Executive of NIW, related to the role of the Board's Remuneration Committee in deciding whether or not to back-date the increase in salary from 1 November 2011, subject to the satisfactory performance of the Company and the Chief Executive over the 2011/12 winter period. It is a matter for the Remuneration Committee to develop the criteria that will be used to judge the performance of the Chief Executive over the winter period and to justify their decision. I have asked to be kept informed.

Land: Maintenance

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister for Regional Development who is responsible for (i) the safe maintenance of land, owned by his Department, that is immediately adjacent to motorways and others types of roads which are not used by adjacent landowners; and (ii) liability for any civil action resulting from injury as a result of falling trees from land, owned by his Department, that is immediately adjacent to motorways and others types of roads which are not used by adjacent landowners.
(AQW 5281/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I assume the Member is referring to the land/verge that lies between the edge of the carriageway or footway and the boundary fence/hedge.

My Department's Roads Service has confirmed that it is responsible for the maintenance of such lands in respect of both motorways and other types of roads. Any boundary fence/hedge is the responsibility of the adjacent landowner, except in the case of motorways, where the boundary fence is the responsibility of Roads Service.

In relation to motorways, liability in respect of falling trees that were growing in these areas, or which formed part of the boundary hedge bounding the motorway, rests with Roads Service.

In the case of other types of roads, liability in respect of falling trees that were growing in the area between the edge of the carriageway and the boundary fence/hedge, also rests with Roads Service. However, liability in respect of falling trees that formed part of the boundary hedge, adjacent to the road, rests with the adjacent landowner.

A5 Road Scheme

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail how the new offer of £50 million for the A5 road project by the Government of the Republic of Ireland differs from the previous offer of £400 million.
(AQW 5289/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member will be aware that the A5 and A8 dual carriageway schemes are being taken forward as a result of an agreement between the Executive and the Irish Government.

At the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) Plenary Meeting on Friday 18 November 2011, it was noted that provision of further funding by the Irish Government, for the progression of both projects, is being deferred, with the Irish Government now providing £25 million per annum towards the project in 2015 and 2016.

It had previously been agreed at the NSMC that payments by the Irish Government were to be made against development milestones within the A5 project. The financial profile of the Irish Government's contribution associated with those milestones is set out below:

Financial Year	Anticipated Irish Gov. Contribution (£M)	Payment Milestones
2009/10	8 (received)	Preferred Route Stage
2010/11	0	
2011/12	14	End of Public Inquiry
2012/13	0	
2013/14	10	Commencement of Construction
2014/15	250	2/3 Completion
2015/16	118	Open to Traffic

Thus far, two payments to the value of £19 million have been made by the Irish Government to the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund. It is anticipated that a further payment of £3 million, which was agreed at the NSMC Plenary Meeting on 18 November 2011, will be made later this financial year. This payment, when made, will honour the Irish Government's financial commitments to the project so far.

A new funding and implementation plan for the projects will now be prepared for agreement at the next NSMC Transport Meeting, with endorsement at the next North South Ministerial Council Plenary Meeting.

When funding is confirmed, I will review the spending priorities across my Department, including the impact on the Strategic Roads Programme.

Roads: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the unadopted roads in the North Down constituency with an outstanding road bond on which houses have been occupied for more than a year.
(AQW 5327/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the unadopted roads in the North Down constituency with an outstanding road bond on which houses have been occupied for more than one year are provided below:

- Beechfield Avenue, Bangor;
- Ballycrochan Road Development;
- Ballycrochan Park/Crescent/Grove(Part);
- Abbington Manor, Bangor – Stage 1;
- Clifton Manor, Bangor;
- Downshire Lane, Bangor;
- Dellmount Crescent, Bangor;
- Hanover Chase/Hill, Bangor;
- Myrtle Grove, The Beeches, Bangor;
- Linen Crescent, Rathgill Parade, Bangor- Stage 1;
- Rathgill Avenue, Bangor (Helm Housing Site);
- Riverwood Vale, Bangor;
- Rockfield Glen, Bangor – Stage 5;
- Seapark Lane, Holywood;
- Shaftsbury, Belfast Road, Bangor;
- Stonebridge Avenue, Bangor (Part);
- Stonebridge Row, Bangor;
- Upritchard Court, Bangor;
- Victoria Mill, Bangor;
- Woodcroft Lane, Holywood; and
- Woodvale Gardens, Bangor.

Roads: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the unadopted roads in the North Down constituency with an outstanding road bond.
(AQW 5328/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the unadopted roads in the North Down constituency with an outstanding road bond are provided below:

- Beechfield Avenue, Bangor;
- Ballycrochan Road Development;
- Ballycrochan Park/Crescent/Grove(Part);
- Abbington Manor, Bangor – Stage 1;
- Clifton Manor, Bangor;
- Downshire Lane, Bangor;
- Dellmount Crescent, Bangor;
- Hanover Chase/Hill, Bangor;
- Myrtle Grove, The Beeches, Bangor;
- Linen Crescent, Rathgill Parade, Bangor- Stage 1;
- Rathgill Avenue, Bangor (Helm Housing Site);
- Riverwood Vale, Bangor;
- Rockfield Glen, Bangor – Stage 5;
- Seapark Lane, Holywood;
- Shaftsbury, Belfast Road, Bangor;
- Stonebridge Avenue, Bangor (Part);
- Stonebridge Row, Bangor;
- Upritchard Court, Bangor;

- Victoria Mill, Bangor;
- Woodcroft Lane, Holywood;
- Woodvale Gardens, Bangor;
- Abbington Manor, Bangor – Stages 2 & 3;
- Bridgelea Development, Green Road, Conlig;
- Gibsons Lane, Bangor (Oaklee Housing Site);
- Linen Crescent, Rathgill Parade – Stages 2, 3 & 4;
- Main Street, Conlig – Footway only at No. 103;
- Primacy Road, Bangor – Footway only at No. 3;
- Rossinver Gardens/Glendowan Way, Bangor; and
- Woodgate Development, Rathgael Road, Bangor.

Sewers

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the unadopted sewers with an outstanding agreements with NI Water, or its predecessor, in the North Down constituency.
(AQW 5329/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that there are currently some 176 development sites in the North Down constituency where persons have constructed, are constructing or proposing to construct a sewerage system. These may be adopted at a future date provided the terms of the agreement have been met. This figure includes agreements with NIW's predecessor, DRD Water Service, which were entered into prior to 1 April 2007.

NIW's records indicate that the developments are at various stages of the process, including pre-assessment, appraisal, approval, preliminary adoption or final adoption stages. Of the 176 developments, 26 are currently at pre-assessment stage. It is the responsibility of the persons constructing the sewerage system to advise NIW when they consider it is completed to a satisfactory standard, to enable the system to be inspected and a Certificate of Completion to be issued with a view to future adoption.

The information requested about unadopted sewers is not readily available and could only be compiled at disproportionate cost.

Sewers: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many sewers in the North Down constituency have been adopted in the last (i) twelve months; (ii) three years; and (iii) five years.
(AQW 5330/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the sewerage system within 13 developments in the North Down constituency have been adopted in the past five years as detailed in the table below.

Date	Development Name
2007	Cove Bay Phase 1, Groomsport
	Cove Bay Phase 3a
	Church Hill, Spencer Street, Holywood
2008	Cove Bay Phase 2a, Groomsport
	Cove Bay Phase 2b, Groomsport
	Beechfield, Conlig
2009	Beechfield, Conlig
2010	Kestrel Park
	Gibson's Green, Bangor
	Willowbrook Park, Bangor
2011	Brook Lane Phase 1, Rathgael Road, Bangor
	Brook Lane Phase 2, Rathgael Road, Bangor
	Balmoral Square, Bangor

Buses: Electronic Passenger Information Systems

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has any plans to introduce electronic passenger information systems at all bus stops and park and ride facilities.
(AQW 5332/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service, in conjunction with Translink, has worked to provide real time passenger information at 188 of the busiest bus stops in Belfast. This facility, which is part of an overall contract costing in the region of £4m over 8 years, provides priority at traffic signals for 305 of Translink's Metro buses and an associated fleet management system.

Translink has in excess of 14,000 bus stops in Northern Ireland and electronic passenger information is currently provided at just over 1% of them. Unfortunately, it would not be realistic to provide electronic passenger information at all of these bus stops. However, the system has the facility to be expanded, should sufficient funding become available in the future.

In addition, my Department, in partnership with the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association and Translink, has just completed an audio visual pilot on bus services on the 5A Metro route in east Belfast. The audio visual systems were installed on buses and at three strategic bus stops along the route.

The pilot project is intended to assess the benefits of audio visual systems for all passengers and, in particular, for those passengers with visual impairments, hearing impairments and older people. A full evaluation of the project is now being carried out by the Department. Future decisions about the extension of audio visual passenger information systems will take account of the evaluation findings and the availability of resources at the time.

Schools: Speed Limits

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department is considering the introduction of a 20 mph speed limit outside schools.
(AQW 5340/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has invested considerable resources in trying to make it as safe as possible for children travelling to and from their schools. Measures installed include warning signs and road markings, advising motorists of the presence of children and additional electronic warning signs installed as part of the Safer Routes to School Initiative.

Schools in residential areas frequently have traffic calming measures such as road humps installed as part of an overall scheme for the surrounding area. Roads Service's speed management policy encourages the further roll out of 20 mph limits and zones in residential and other areas, where there is a high proportion of vulnerable road users present. However, these are only effective when they are backed up with physical traffic calming measures, or where the existing average speed of vehicles is close to 20 mph. Research has shown that erecting permanent 20 mph signs will usually only result in a 1 mph reduction in speeds and will quickly fall into disrepute, whenever drivers see that there is no activity at schools for the vast majority of time.

Roads Service recently piloted part time 20 mph speed limits at two schools, where the national speed limit applies. These have been very successful at keeping speeds down during those periods when there was activity at the school entrance, such as, at opening and closing time. There was a less marked reduction in speeds during an urban school pilot.

The part-time 20 mph speed limits are now approved for use outside schools and have been incorporated into Roads Service policy on speed management. At an approximate cost of £64,000 per rural site, the system seems very expensive, although it is considered that further savings could be made with amendments to the equipment and greater economies of scale, should a major capital programme be launched. Road Service is currently developing more cost effective measures, however, given the major constraints on public service budgets that all Departments are having to deal with, I don't expect to be able to announce the go-ahead for a comprehensive programme for some time unless additional funding is made available.

Roads Service is also currently developing a new all embracing policy that will focus on rationalising all the current Road Safety Engineering Measures at Schools. This will look at all engineering measures available to improve safety outside schools.

Enniskillen Bypass

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development whether the proposals for a southern by-pass at Enniskillen will link in with the future development of a ring-road for the town.
(AQW 5341/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the A4 Enniskillen Southern Bypass involves the provision of a single carriageway extending from the A4 Belfast Road to the A4 Sligo Road, crossing the A509 Derrylin Road.

The preferred corridor has been identified and work is currently progressing towards the identification of a preferred route. The scheme remains the highest priority strategic road improvement proposal for the town of Enniskillen.

At present, there are no plans for a ring road around Enniskillen. However, if such a proposal were to be considered for the town at some stage in the future, then the bypass would most likely form an integral element of it.

A4 Dual Carriageway: Stangmore to Ballygawley

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of the 11 known incidents of vehicles travelling against the flow of traffic along the A4 Dual Carriageway from Stangmore to Ballygawley, whether he will introduce signage of a motorway standard to prevent a major traffic collision; and if he will make a statement on this matter.
(AQW 5396/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it is aware of reported incidents of motorists travelling against the flow of traffic on the A4 Dual Carriageway. Following the first reported incident, Roads Service and the PSNI undertook a safety

review of all the junctions on the new dual carriageway. The review concluded that enhanced signage at all the junctions should be provided. However, I understand that three of the most recent incidents occurred after the enhanced signage was provided.

Roads Service has also advised that a Stage 4 Road Safety Audit was undertaken on 8 December 2011 and it will report in due course, giving particular consideration to the need for further safety improvements at junctions along the new dual carriageway.

I assume that the motorway standard signage to which the Member refers is "wig-wag" red lights that flash alternatively below "No Entry" signs on motorway off slip junctions. These particular features are not currently used on dual carriageways. However, given the number of incidents that have been reported of vehicles travelling against the normal flow of traffic, their use on this route, together with other measures, will be specifically considered as part of the safety audit.

Buses: Fitted Cameras

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the percentage of Translink buses with cameras fitted, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 5451/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The percentage of the Translink fleet fitted with CCTV equipment in each of the last five years is as follows:

Company	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Ulsterbus	15%	27%	34%	44%	47%
Metro (Citybus)	3%	25%	28%	28%	29%

Buses and Coaches: Audiovisual Information

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to extend the provision of audio-visual information to buses and coaches.
(AQW 5463/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department, in partnership with the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association and Translink, has recently completed an audio visual pilot on bus services on the 5A Metro route in East Belfast. The audio visual systems were installed on buses and at three strategic bus stops along the route. The pilot project was intended to assess the benefits of audio visual systems for all passengers and in particular for those with visual impairments, hearing impairments and older people. A full evaluation of the pilot project will be carried out by my Department. Future decisions about the extension of audio visual passenger information systems will be taken in light of the evaluation and the resources available at the time.

Public Transport: Blind or Partially-sighted People

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to assist further people who are blind or partially sighted using public transport.
(AQW 5464/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is implementing an Accessible Transport Strategy for Northern Ireland which seeks to address a wide range of barriers that impede the use of the transport system by older people and people with disabilities. This Strategy includes the piloting of Audio Visual systems on buses and I have provided greater detail on this in my answer to AQW 5463/11-15.

Roads Service works closely with local access committees when developing schemes and uses the guidance provided in the Department for Transport's 'Inclusive Mobility' when designing new works in urban environments. Tactile paving is included in all new work and has been widely provided elsewhere. Audible or tactile devices are provided at all traffic controlled crossings.

In conjunction with Royal National Institute of Blind People, Translink instructors have recently completed a "train the trainers" session with staff from Lisburn in Focus. This will enable Translink instructors to provide visual awareness training to other staff.

Translink is currently working with Royal National Institute of Blind People and Guide Dogs for the Blind Association to achieve a centre of excellence accreditation for the bus and rail stations in Lisburn. If successful, it is hoped that this will set a benchmark for services throughout Translink.

I will be meeting shortly with the Director for the Royal National Institute of Blind People, to discuss my Department's ongoing contribution to the UK Vision Strategy which aims to enhance the inclusion, participation and independence for people with sight loss.

Shared Spaces Schemes: Belfast City Centre

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans there are to introduce a shared surface pavement scheme in Belfast city centre.
(AQW 5465/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it currently has no plans to introduce a shared surface pavement scheme in Belfast city centre.

Shared space/public realm schemes in Northern Ireland are generally promoted by the Department for Social Development and Roads Service is a consultee in this process.

Shared Spaces Schemes: Blind or Partially-sighted People

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what consultation his Department has had with groups representing people who are blind or partially sighted on any potential shared surface pavement schemes.
(AQW 5466/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has had no consultation with groups representing people who are blind or partially sighted on any potential shared surface pavement schemes.

Car Parking: Disabled Persons' Spaces

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the measures taken by his Department to ensure that disabled parking bays are not used by non-disbaled people.
(AQW 5476/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that parking in a disabled person's parking space without clearly displaying a valid Blue Badge is a parking contravention for which a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) can be issued by a Traffic Attendant.

From 1 January 2011 to 30 November 2011, 6,779 PCNs were issued to vehicles parked in a disabled person's space without clearly displaying a valid Blue Badge.

PCNs can be issued to vehicles which are illegally parked on the public road or in a Roads Service car-park. Roads Service has no authority or responsibility for parking enforcement on private land.

A5 Road Scheme

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Regional Development, following the November North-South Ministerial Council Meeting, whether the terms of reference between his Department and transport officials in Dublin have been agreed in relation to the A5 road scheme; and, if so, to outline those terms of reference.
(AQW 5499/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As the Member is aware, the A5 and A8 dual carriageway schemes have been taken forward as a result of an agreement between the Executive and the Irish Government.

At the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) Plenary meeting held on Friday 18 November 2011, it was noted that provision of further funding by the Irish Government, for progression of the A5 and A8 projects, is being deferred and that in this regard, the Irish Government will provide £25 million per annum in 2015 and 2016 towards the projects.

It was also agreed at this meeting that the relevant Departments will prepare a new funding and implementation plan for the projects, for agreement at the next NSMC Transport meeting, with endorsement at the next NSMC Plenary meeting.

A5 Road Scheme

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the outcome of the November North South Ministerial Council meeting in relation to any decisions taken on the A5 road scheme.
(AQW 5500/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As the Member is aware, the A5 and A8 dual carriageway schemes have been taken forward as a result of an agreement between the Executive and the Irish Government.

At the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) Plenary meeting held on Friday 18 November 2011, it was noted that provision of further funding by the Irish Government, for progression of the A5 and A8 projects, is being deferred and that in this regard, the Irish Government will provide £25 million per annum in 2015 and 2016 towards the projects.

It was also agreed at the Plenary meeting that the relevant Departments will prepare a new funding and implementation plan for the projects, for agreement at the next NSMC Transport meeting, with endorsement at the next NSMC Plenary meeting.

A5 Road Scheme

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Regional Development whether officials from any other Department, other than his own, will attend the proposed meeting in Dublin with officials from the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport to discuss the A5 road scheme.
(AQW 5502/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that my officials will engage with officials from the Irish Government, Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, along with officials from the Department of Finance and Personnel in Northern Ireland, to discuss a new funding and implementation plan for the A5 and A8 projects, for agreement at the next NSMC Transport meeting, with endorsement at the next NSMC Plenary meeting.

A5 Road Scheme

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Regional Development for a breakdown of the money spent by his Department to date on the A5 road scheme.
(AQW 5503/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, to date, approximately £40 million has been spent on development of the A5 dual carriageway project. In addition to professional fees in the preliminary development and design of 85km of dual carriageways, this cost includes topographical and environmental surveys, and ground investigation.

This has enabled the progression of the scheme through the preliminary options stage, to identify the preferred corridor, the preferred options stage, to identify the preferred route, and on to the statutory procedures stage. I am currently awaiting the Inspector's Report from the Public Inquiry into the draft statutory orders. I anticipate receipt of this report early in the New Year.

Thus far two payments, to the value of £19m, have been made by the Irish Government to the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund. It is anticipated that a further payment of £3m, which was agreed at the North South Ministerial Council Plenary meeting on 18 November 2011, will be made later this financial year.

Roads Service officials further advise that, due to the overlap in activities, it is not practicable to accurately breakdown the expenditure between stages.

Bus Service: Derry to Dublin

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development why bus services have been reduced on the Derry to Dublin route, meaning that there is no service on this route between 16.30 and 23.00; and what pressure he can apply to have more frequent services on this route.
(AQW 5513/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised that it has to plan and deploy its resources on this particular service taking due account of the varying level of demand in order that the route remains economically viable. The level of patronage on Ulsterbus Service 274, operated in partnership with Bus Éireann, shows a significant variation between the summer and winter months. The winter timetable operating from November 2011 until March 2012 has been designed to ensure that those journeys, which have all year round patronage and are profitable, have been retained. These changes were agreed in discussion with Bus Éireann.

Timetabling issues such as frequency are operational matters for Translink and for the other transport providers on this route. I understand that between 1630 and 2300 hours there are opportunities to use the Ulsterbus service 273 from Londonderry both to Strabane and Omagh to interline with either of two Bus Eireann services which operate during this period between Letterkenny and Dublin. In addition, there is a privately operated coach service which leaves Londonderry at 1700 hours every day from Monday to Saturday and travels to Dublin Airport and Dublin O'Connell Street.

West Belfast: Schedule of Planned Works

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the schedule of works planned for the West Belfast constituency for the 2011-15 budgetary period.
(AQW 5529/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would remind the Member that information on completed and proposed roads schemes for the current financial year can be found in Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from my Department's internet site at the following web address:

http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/cinformationtype-results.htm?signpost=Customer+information&informationType=Roads+Service+reports+to+councils

I can advise that the detailed budget for subsequent years has not yet been finalised and it is therefore not possible to provide details of future works programmes at this time.

Traffic Calming Measures in West Belfast

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development to list the traffic calming measures which have been implemented in West Belfast over the last two years; and the measures that will be introduced in the next twelve months.
(AQW 5530/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would remind the Member that information on completed and proposed roads schemes for the current financial year can be found in Roads Service's Spring and Autumn Reports to Councils. These reports can be accessed from my Department's internet site at the following web address:

http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information/cinformationtype-results.htm?signpost=Customer+information&informationType=Roads+Service+reports+to+councils

I can advise that the detailed budget for subsequent years has not yet been finalised and it is therefore not possible to provide details of future works programmes at this time.

Air Travel: Cost

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total cost incurred by his Department on air travel (i) between Northern Ireland and Heathrow Airport from January to December 2010; and (ii) between Northern Ireland and all airports in Great Britain, excluding Heathrow Airport, from January to December 2010.
(AQW 5531/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The following table sets out the costs of air travel between Northern Ireland and airports in Great Britain in the period 1 January 2010 to 31 December 2010.

Air Travel to Great Britain in 2010	Total Cost
(i) Between Northern Ireland and Heathrow Airport	£ 26,088.66
(ii) Between Northern Ireland and All Airports in Great Britain (excluding Heathrow Airport)	£ 28,854.79

There were also a small number of flights to European destinations from Northern Ireland airports that required connection flights through Heathrow Airport. The costs of the Northern Ireland to Heathrow Airport legs of these journeys are not included in the above figures. The costs of the journeys from Northern Ireland to Heathrow Airport in these instances are not separately identifiable.

Cotterhill Road, Downpatrick

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will initiate an adoption proceeding on the section of Cotterhill Road, Downpatrick which was abandoned by the former Downpatrick and Rural District Council.
(AQW 5630/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the short cul-de-sac leading to private property at the junction of the Cotterhill Road and the main A7 Downpatrick to Belfast Road appears to have been abandoned at the time of the construction of the A7.

This is now a private lane which does not meet the standards required for a public road and there would be no benefit in Roads Service adopting this lane into the public road network.

Roads: North Antrim

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQO 921/11-15, why there were more claims made in 2009/10 than in 2008/09 and 2010/11; and why the average compensation paid out in 2009/10 was £131.43 compared with £69.27 in 2010/11.
(AQW 5635/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that more claims, arising out of uneven road surfaces, were made in 2009/10 than in 2008/09 and 2010/11 due to the impact of the cold winter of 2009/10, which caused repeated freeze/thaw cycles on the road network. Although the winter weather of 2010/11 was considered to be more severe than 2009/10, the snow that lay on the unsalted road network last winter prevented the ingress of water, thereby resulting in less damage to the road surface.

I also note that the average compensation figures quoted appear to have been calculated by dividing "the total compensation paid" by the "number of claims received" for the same year. However, this calculation does not take account of the claims where liability was denied by Roads Service and no compensation paid, or claims where a decision has not yet been made. Roads Service has advised that of the 191 claims received in 2009/10, 61 were rejected and 2 are still under investigation. Similarly, of the 175 claims received in 2010/11, 101 claims were rejected and 2 are still under investigation. The average compensation payment is calculated by dividing the "settlement amount" by the "number of claims settled". Therefore, the average amount paid per compensation claim in 2009/10 and 2010/11 was £196 and £192 respectively.

Roads: Magherafelt, Cookstown and Dungannon

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development which roads in the (i) Magherafelt; (ii) Cookstown; and (iii) Dungannon districts are served by asbestos water mains pipes.
(AQW 5691/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the roads listed in the attached table are served by asbestos cement water mains:

Magherafelt Council Area	Cookstown Council Area	Dungannon Council Area
Cahore Road	Templereagh Road	Agharan Road
Cahore Terrace	Killycanavan Road	Altaveedan Road
Iniscarn Road	Lower Kildress Road	Altmore Drive
Grange Road	Littlebridge Road	Annaghilla Road

Magherafelt Council Area	Cookstown Council Area	Dungannon Council Area
Longfield Lane	Ballygruby Road	Annaghroe Road
Glenmaquill Road	Kinnagillian Road	Ardmore Terrace
Wood Road	Dunnamore Road	Ballagh Road
Ballynagown Road	Broughderg Road	Ballygawley Roundabout
Kilcronaghan Road	Camlough Road	Ballygittle Road
Sixtowns Road	Killeenan Road	Ballynany Road
Tobermore Road	Keerin Road	Battleford Road
Desertmartin Road	Murnells Road	Bernagh Gardens
Lissadell Drive	Blackrock Road	Black Lane
Derrynoyd Road	Cavanoneill Road	Bleachfield Park
Drumard Road	Tulnacross Road	Bovean Road
Magherafelt Road	Limehill Road	Brackaville Road
Draperstown Road	Drum Road	Broom Drive
Duntibryan Road	Upper Kildress Road	Carnteel Road
Clooney Road	Keenaghan Road	Castle Lane
Roshure Road	Corvanaghan Road	Castletown Road
Moneyneany Road	Baladoogh Lane	Cavan Road
Gortinari	Beltonanean Road	Cedar Ridge
Mulnavoo Road	Cloughfin Road	Clontyclevin Road
St. Patricks Street	Ballynasolus Road	Corkhill Road
Moykeeran Crescent	Gortreagh Road	Craigavon Crescent
Glenshane Park	Knockaleery Road	Cullenramer Road
Slieve Gallion Drive	Tamnaskeeny Road	Cunninghams Lane
Slieve Gallion Park	Pomeroy Road	Derrycourtney Road
Moydamlaght Road	Magheraglass Road	Derrygally Road
Five Mile Straight	Rectory Road	Derrygally Way
Moykeeran Drive	Wellbrook Road	Dreemore Road
Moneyneany Lane	Killymoon Street	Drumconnor Road
Gortahurk Road	Orritor Road	Drumcoo Green
Forgetown Road	Corkill Road	Drumcullion Lane
Coolshinney Road	Flo Road	Drumflugh Road
Carraloan Road	Esker Road	Drumglass Way
Main Street	Feegarron Lane	Dunore Avenue
Longfield Road	Creevagh Road	Edfield Way
Drumsamney Road	Creevagh Lane	Espey Park
Gulladuff Road	Lough Fea Road	Farriter Road
Gulladuff Hill	Killycurragh Road	Favour Royal Road
Ballymoghan Lane	Lissan Road	Feroy Lane

Magherafelt Council Area	Cookstown Council Area	Dungannon Council Area
Killyfaddy Road	Feegarron Road	Garvagh Road
Ballymulligan Road	Drumgrass Road	Glasdrummond Road
Ballyronan Road	Drumearn Road	Glencon Road
Mulderg Road	Meenanea Road	Glenmont Park
Letteran Road	Drumnamalta Road	Gorey Road
Tirgan Road	Davagh Road	Gortavale Road
Carncose Road	Turnaface Road	Gortnagola Road
Ballymoghan Road	Claggan Road	Grange Park
Ballymaguigan Road	Muntober Road	Grange Road
Waterfoot Road	Ballybriest Road	Grove Way
Gracefield Road	Tullynure Road	Halftown Road
Aughrim Road	Corby Road	Hillcrest
Barrack Road	Dirnan Road	Hillcrest Park
Piney Hill	Letteran Road	Jacksonville Road
Moneymore Road	Tullyveagh Road	Kedew Road
Queens Avenue	Killymoon Road	Kilcoole Drive
Meadowbank Drive	Birchgrove	Killyman Road
Beechland Road	Tullyboy Road	Killymeal Road
Beechland Drive	Coltrim Lane	Killyneill Road
Westland Road	Ardboe Road	Knockaginny Road
Sperrin View	Kinrush Road	Leany Road
Crocknamohil Road	Windsor Terrace	Legane Road
Mayogall Road	Drumad Road	Lisdoart Road
Coleraine Road	Ballinderry Bridge Road	Lisduff Lane
O'hara Road	Spring Road	Lisginny Road
Station Road	Shore Road	Lismore Road
Crewe Drive	Belagherty Road	Lisnagowan Road
Mckenna Rise	Brookmount Road	Lisnamonaghan Road
Crawfordsburn Drive	Aghaveagh Road	Lisnawery Road
Crew Road	Urbal Lane	Listamlet Road
Ballymacilcurr Road	Main Street	Main Road
Tirgarvil Road	Ballygillen Road	Main Street
Carnaman Road	Killymuck Road	Maydown Terrace
Innishrush Road	Loup Road	Milltown
Tonagh Heights	Knockadoo Road	Minterburn Road
Culnady Road	Maghadone Lane	Mourne Avenue
Tirnageeragh Cottages	Dunronan Road	Mourne Crescent
Mckennas Lane	Tamlaght Road	Moygashel Court

Magherafelt Council Area	Cookstown Council Area	Dungannon Council Area
Macknagh Road	Ruskey Road	Moygashel Lane
Ballynease Road	Springhill Road	Moygashel Park
Quarry Road	Drumrot Road	Mullaghanagh Lane
Drumbolg Road	Ballymaguire Road	Mullaghmore Road
Killycon Road	Cloverhill Road	Mullaghmoyle Road
Beechland Gardens	Drumenny Road	Mullybrannon Road
Ford Road	Rock Road	Northland Place
Glenone Road	Ballymoyle Road	Northland Way
Creagh Road	Lawford Street	Oaks Road
Clady Road	Circular Road	Old Caulfield Road
Riverview Lane	Market Street	Old Eglish Road
New Ferry Road	Smith Street	Orpheus Drive
Glenone Villas	Station Road	Parkanaur Road
Dunronan Road	Desertmartin Road	Platers Hill
Castledawson Road	Bridger Street	Pomeroy Road
Sandy Grove	Conyngham Street	Prince Andrew Crescent
Pound Road	Rockbrook Road	Quarry Lane
Annaghmore Road	Ballyneill Road	Ranaghan Road
Moyola Avenue	Ballynagilly Road	Remeen
Chichester Avenue	Moneyhaw Road	Remeen Drive
Orr Road	Scotts Road	Riverview Bungalows
Shore Road	Tullyreavy Road	Roskeen Road
Garden Street	Shivey Road	Roughan Road
Hospital Road	Kiltyclay Road	Screeby Road
Derramore Park	Aghafad Road	Seyloran Lane
Ballyheifer Road	Bardahessiagh Road	Springfield Crescent
Moyola Road	Tanderagee Road	Syerla Road
Bowmans Road	Sessiagh Scott Road	Tamnamore Road
Meadowfield Place	Cashel Lane	Thornhill Road
Shilgrove Place	Kiltyclogher Road	Trew Mount Road
Mullaghboy Crescent	Crossglebe	Tullyaran Road
King Street	Strews Road	Tullybryan Road
Union Road	Rockdale Road	Tullyvar Road
Bellshill Road	Lurgy Road	Tullywinny Road
Park View	Killygarvan Road	Washingford Row
Parker Avenue	Killygarvin Road	Woodlawn Drive
New Row	Annaghone Road	Woodlawn Park
Brough Road	Ballynafeagh Road	Woodvale Park

Magherafelt Council Area	Cookstown Council Area	Dungannon Council Area
Hillhead Road	Killycolpy Road	
Oldtown Road	Sluggan Road	
Hillhead Terrace	Castlefarm Road	
Killyberry Road	Keeragh	
Creagh Hill	Slate Quarry Road	
Deerpark Road	Tirnaskea Road	
Sersons Road	Trainors Terrace	
Garrison Road	Lucy Street	
Mullaghboy Road	Cookstown Road	
Lurganagoose Road	Annahavil Road	
Glenshane Road	Moneygaragh Road	
Broagh Road	Ballynakilly Road	
Mcmaster Crescent	West Street	
Bridge Street	Aughagranna Road	
Moyola Park	Mountjoy Road	
Ballynacross Road	Lammy Road	
The Cairns	Hillside	
Ashbourne	Ballygruby Lane	
Drumlamph Road	Hammond Street	
Church Street	Beaghmore Road	
Carricknakielt Road	Ronan Manor	
Castle Street	Jubilee Park	
William Street	Derryloran Place	
Malcolm Villas	Cooke Crescent	
Crawfordsburn	Castle Villas	
Glen Road	Mullan Road	
Glenview	Conway Close	
Glencree	Mckinney Park	
Kilrea Road	Loughdoo Road	
Hunters Park	New Line Road	
Coolagh Road	Loughbracken Road	
Mullagh Road	Tullywiggan Road	
Craigadick Road	Killybearn Road	
Ballyknock Road	Hawthorn Manor	
Ranaghan Road	Tobin Park	
Glenvale	Woodvale Crescent	
Garvagh Road	Mill Lane	
Moneysallin Road	High Street	

Magherafelt Council Area	Cookstown Council Area	Dungannon Council Area
Drumlane Road	Northland Road	
Hervey Hill Road	Magherafelt Road	
Lismoyle Road	Cloneen Drive	
Boveedy Road	Northland Gardens	
Lisnagrot Road	Rockview Park	
Fallahogy Road	Carnagh	
Moneygran Road	Kilreish Estate	
Hillside Cottages	Ballybeg Lane	
Garden Terrace	Gaussen Villas	
Rainey Street	Craigs Road	
Killyneese Road	Ramper Road	
Shandon Park	New Road	
Davison Villas	Churchtown Road	
Tamnadeese Road	Davagh Park	
Mullaghboy Lane	Cherry Hill	
Broad Street	Annaghquin Road	
Springfield Park	Tullyodonnell Road	
Beatrice Villas	Killyneedan Road	
Alexander Park	Mullaghmoyle Road	
Brown Drive	Oughterard Road	
Tamney Crescent	Corrycroar Road	
Hawthorne Road	North Street	
Carn View	Kilmascally Road	
Aghagaskin Road	Legmurn Road	
Jacksons Drive	Newmills Road	
Curran Road	Tullywiggan Cottages	
Blackpark Road	Drumullan Manor	
Oak Park	Church View	
High Street	Bridgend Road	
Upper Golf Terrace	Drapersfield Road	
Fairhill Road	Fairhill	
Mossbawn	Fairlea Heights	
Knocknagin Road	Hammond Mews	
Mullaghboy Hill Road	Riverbrook Court	
Rectory Road	Eglish Close	
Gortmore	Orchard View	
Parker Gardens	Ballymulligan Road	
Old Tyanee Road	Woodvale Road	

Magherafelt Council Area	Cookstown Council Area	Dungannon Council Area
Lisheen Park	Drumconvis Road	
Megargy Road	Birchwood Park	
Dunlogan Road	Lisaclare Road	
Fort View	Tamlaghtmore Road	
Lisnamuck Road	Crockbane Road	
Knockadoo Road	Trickvallen Road	
Quilly Road	Finvey Lane	
Ballyriff Road	Carnenny Lane	
Killowen Drive	Lisnanane Lane	
Golf Terrace	Sandholes Road	
Sandy Braes	Gortacar Road	
Oakland Crescent	Bardahessiagh Lane	
Roundabout	Cornamaddy Road	
Ronan Drive	Gortnaskea Road	
Lester Park	Killywoolaghan Road	
Highfield Road	Mckeown's Lane	
Kirk Avenue	Blackbog Road	
Princess Drive	Ballygonny Road East	
Mill Park	Salterstown Road	
Campletown Terrace	Crouck Road	
Woodland Road	Legnacash Road	
Moyola Court	Dunmore Lane	
Rainey Court	Doons Road	
Dromore Road	Glenarny Road	
Brackaghlislea Road	Mackenny Road	
Fern Drive	Drumgarrell Road	
Hazeldene Avenue	Mossband Road	
Regency Court	Ballydawley Road	
Churchwell Lane	Rogully Road	
Brackagh Road	Dunnabraggy Road	
Moorside Villas	Moss Road	
Brough Terrace	Lindsay Ville	
Maghera Road	Ballyronan Road	
Millview	Edendoit Road	
Bells Court	Sherrigrim Road	
Moyola View	Dungannon Road	
Gregg Gardens	Tullylagan Road	
King William Iii Crescent	Tullyard Road	

Magherafelt Council Area	Cookstown Council Area	Dungannon Council Area
Beagh Terrace	Loughnamarve Road	
Martins Terrace	Brigh Road	
Cooke Avenue	Brookend Road	
Martinvale Park	Roughan Road	
St. Lurachs Gardens	Ballygittle Road	
Tirkane Road	Carnan Road	
Knocknakielt Road	Gorticashel Road	
Mullagh Close	Beltonanean Lane	
Thompson Gardens	Terrywhinny Lane	
Beaver Crescent	Unagh Road	
Fair Hill	Toberlane Road	
Glen Close	Coolreaghs Road	
Riverview Park	Drummullan Road	
Tamlaght Road	Lisnahall Road	
Drumard Hill	Ballyeglish Road	
Downings Road	Urbal Road	
Longlands	Carrydarragh Road	
Friels Terrace	Maghadone Road	
Ringsend Close	Battery Road	
Moneysharvan Road	Trickwallen Road	
Moyagoney Road	Scotchtown Lane	
Mallon Villas	Ballyriff Road	
Princess Gardens	Ballynargan Road	
Sperrin Drive	Annaghmore Road	
Slemish View	Caneese Road	
Lester Gardens	Northland Drive	
Beechland Place	Tullynagee Road	
Killross Villas	Mawillian Road	
Bells Manor	River View	
Broagh Village	Cavanakeeran Road	
Mullagh Lane	Turnabarson Road	
Meadow Villas	Fairgreen Street	
Drumconready Road	Gortscraheen Road	
Craigmore Road	Blacktown Road	
Loughinsholin Park	Mourne View	
Glenelly Villas		
Gorse Road		
Luney Lane		

Magherafelt Council Area	Cookstown Council Area	Dungannon Council Area
Drumderg Road		
Gortnaskey Road		
Tullynagee Road		
Brackagh Lane		
Ballynagarve Road		
Strawmore Road		
Loves Road		
Dunarnon Road		
Island Road		
Lisalbanagh Road		
Killyboggin Road		
Ballyscullion Lane		
Brackaghreilly Road		
Ballydermot Road		
Tamlaghduff Road		
Ballymacombs Road		
Tamlaghduff Park		
Ballymacombs Lane		
Curr Road		
Drumimerick Road		
Grove Terrace		
Leitrim Road		
Tamney Martin Road		
Macknagh Lane		
Tullyheran Road		
Rocktown Road		
Curragh Road		
Eden Road		
Boyne Row		
Jubilee Road		
Derrynoyd Lane		
Cloane Road		
Luney Road		
Rosgarran Road		
Motalee Road		
Rockbrook Road		
Derg Lane		
Moss Road		

Magherafelt Council Area	Cookstown Council Area	Dungannon Council Area
Grange Lane		
Gortamney Lane		
Killyberry Lane		
Carricknakielt Lane		
Ballyscullion Road		
Dreenan Road		
Aughrim Lane		
The Island		
Glenvale Road		
Culbane Road		
Killygullib Road		
Currish Lane		

Newtownards: Saturday Market

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development under what terms would his Department permit Newtownards Saturday market to relocate temporarily to a Roads Service car park during the renovation of Conway Square, Newtownards.
(AQW 5750/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the use of car parks for trading is prohibited under the Off-Street Parking Bye-Laws (Northern Ireland) 1994 paragraph 12. Implementation of the necessary change to the legislation, even for a temporary period, could not be completed by January 2012.

The use of certain car parks for markets and fairs, such as, those held in Smithfield Square East, Lisburn, dates back to arrangements put in place during the re-organisation of local government in 1973. At this time, the responsibility for administering car parks was transferred from Councils to Roads Service and appropriate clauses and conditions were agreed at that time. No such arrangements are in place for either the South Street/Court Street or Kennel Lane car parks in Newtownards.

I understand that Roads Service is liaising with Ards Borough Council to establish if their proposed improvements could be split into phases, whereby works would be carried out in part of Conway Square, while the remaining area would remain available for use by the traders.

Roads Service is hopeful that this proposal will be acceptable to Ards Borough Council and will be implemented when the renovation works start in January.

West Belfast: Grit Boxes

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the location of the grit boxes in the Colin Area of west Belfast.
(AQW 5808/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that there are 93 salt/grit boxes in the general Colin area of west Belfast. The location of each of these is detailed in the table below:

Sect	Road No.	Road Name	Location
VL03	U1002/01	Glenmeen Close	Opposite House No. 5 on Green
WL01	U7102/36	The Manor,Blacks Rd	At SL No. 1
WL01	U7115/22	Glenburn Road	At SL No. 63
WL01	U7115/22	Glenburn Road	At SL No. 44
WL01	U7115/22	Glenburn Road	At JCT Beattie Pk
WL01	U7104/18	Glenhead Ave.	Opposite STL9/House No. 31 on Main Road
WL01	U7106/05	Sunnymede Park 2	Opposite. SL No. 4 at wall

Sect	Road No.	Road Name	Location
WL01	U7106/05	Sunnymede Park 1	At SL No. 2
WL01	U7106/07	Sunnyhill Park	At JCT Upper Dunmurry Lane
WL01	U7105/13	Willow Gardens	At JCT Rowan Drive
WL01	U7105/25	Seymour Hill Mews	At St No. 7
WL01	U7105/52	Rivergrove	At SL No. 4
WL01	U7105/03	Larch Grove	Between SL No. 11 and 14
WL01	U7105/35	Housernbeam Rd 2	Opposite SL No. 10/Mace
WL01	U7105/35	Housernbeam Rd 1	At Side of House No. 99
WL01	U7105/26	Hawthouserne Park	At House No. 5
WL01	U7105/42	Glenwood Park 2	At SL No. 8
WL01	U7105/42	Glenwood Park 1	At SL No. 31
WL01	U7104/18	Glenhead Ave.	Opposite SL No. 5/House No. 43
WL01	U7104/12	Glenariff Drive	Jct. Glenburn Rd/St1
WL01	U7104/15	Glenaan Ave 3	Side House No. 22
WL01	U7104/15	Glenaan Ave 2	JCT Glenburn Rd/Opposite SL No. 1
WL01	U7104/15	Glenaan Ave 1	JCT Glendun Pk
WL01	U7105/15	Birch Green	At Steps Opposite House No. 24
WL01	U7104/06	Beatties Park South	On Bend
WL01	U7105/12	Ashlea Bend	At School Gates SL No. 3
WL01	U7102/05	The Green, Dunmurry	SL No. 1 Edenvale
WL01	U7106/08	Areema Drive 2	At SL No. 2
WL01	U7106/08	Areema Drive 1	Opposite SL No. 8
WL01	U7102/34	Oakhurst Avenue	Side of House No. 123 at end of Footway
WL01	U7106/04	Lenwood Drive	Opposite House No. 1
WM01	U7107/08	Woodside View	At House No. 52
WM01	U7017/11	Woodside Park	At House No. 3
WM01	U7107/46+47	Laurelbank, Poleglass	At SL No. 34
WM01	U7101/53	Colinvale,Poleglass	Side of House No. 48 on Grass
WM01	U7101/73	Colinvale,Poleglass	Opposite House No. 110 on Grass
WM01	U7101/73	Colinvale,Poleglass	At House No. 18
WM01	U7107/07	Woodside View	Rear House No. 94
WM01	U7107/56	Glenwood Poleglass	On Footway Opposite SL No. 3
WM01	U7107/56	Glenwood View,Poleglass	Rear Sl No. 5
WM01	U7115/25	Glenbawn Cres	At House No. 8 (On Verge) at Wall
WM01	U7117/15	Ardcaoin Park Poleglass	At Sl No. 3
WM01	U7117/22	Ardcaoin View	At Wall Of Jct Ardcaoin Place
WM01	U7117-18	Ardcaoin Avenue	At SL No. 48 Beside House No. 35
WM01	U7117-18	Ardcaoin Avenue	At SL No. 34

Sect	Road No.	Road Name	Location
WM01	U7117/15	Ardcaoin Park	At SL No. 3 (At Fence)
WM01	U7117-02	Glenkeen	At SL No. 6
WM01	U7101/40	Merrion Park	Opposite House No. 3
WM01	U7101/40	Merrion Park	At House No. 91 (Originally at No. 94)
WM01	U7101/35	Springbank Close	House No. 21 at Wall
WM01	U7101/37	Good Shepherd Rd	At School
WM02	U7106/75	Summerhill Drive	At House No. 34
WM02	U7116/15	Cherry Gardens	House Nos. 19/21 on Grass Area
WM02	U7016/10	Glasvey Rise	At JCT Glasvey Drive
WM02	U7116/50	Glasvey Rise	SL No. 130
WM02	U7106/20	Gardenmore Road	At St. Marks School
WM02	U7106/29	Broom Park	At SL No. 5 Opposite House No. 31
WM02	U7106/29	Almond Drive 1	House No. 4 at Wall
WM02	U7106/41	Almond Drive 2	At SL No.19/ House No. 40
WM02	U7116/13	Aspen Park	Opposite SL No. 7 On Grass
WM02	U7116/13	Aspen Park	At SL No. 1 On Grass
WM03	U7105/55	Mount Eagles Ave	At Side SL No. 2
WM03	U7105/55	Mount Eagles Ave	At House No. 45
WM03	U7108/73	White Rise	At SL No. 52
WM03	U7115/55	Teeling View	Near SL No. 1/Opposite House No. 16
WM03	U7108/15	Lagmore Meadows	Opposite House No. 170 At Fence
WM03	U7108/46	Lagmore Glen	Bad Bend Above House No. 24
WM03	U7108/46	Lagmore Glen	Sl No. 3 At Roundabout
WM03	U7108/46	Lagmore Glen	At Side House No. 63
WM03	U7108/46	Lagmore Glen	Opposite House No. 93
WM03	U7108/46	Lagmore Glen	Opposite House No. 132
WM03	U7108/46	Lagmore Glen	Opposite House No. 146
WM03	U7108/46	Lagmore Rise	At SL No. 14 (New Bin 25/2/2011)
WM03	U7101/23	Old Colin	At House Nos. 78/79
WM03	U7101/05	Glengoland Park 1	Opposite House No. 10 On Verge
WM03	U7101/05	Glengoland Parade	At SL No. 14
WM03	U7101/16	Glengoland Gds	At House No. 50 At Wall
WM03	U7101/17	Glengoland Cres	At Glengoland Gds At Wall SL No. 1
WM03	U7101/01	Glengoland Ave 3	At House No. 70
WM03	U7101/01	Glengoland Ave 2	Opposite SL No. 6 At Wall
WM03	U7101/03	Glengoland Ave 1	At JCT Glengoland Pk On Verge
WM03	U7012/17	Margaretta Park	At Side Of House No. 7
WM03	U7115/47	Glendowan Park	At House No. 9 On Grass Verge

Sect	Road No.	Road Name	Location
WM03	U7115/47	Glendowan Park	At Side Of House No. 2 Beside Gate
WM03	U7115/50	Glendowan Grove	At House No. 1 On Grass Verge
WM03	U7116/32	Credenhill Park	Opposite Forest Pk Sign On Grass
WM03	U7116/32	Credenhill Park	Opposite House No. 33
WM03	U7102/11	Cloona Park 1	Jct Cloona Ave Opposite House No. 64
WM03	U7102/11	Cloona Park 1	House No. 42A
WM03	U7102/11	Cloona Park 1	Side House No. 121/Jct Cloona Ave At Wall
WM03	U7101-58	Hazelwood Avenue	At House No. 137
Z02H	M0001	Blacks Road	At Park & Ride Area
Z02H	M0001	Sprucefield	At Park & Ride Area

Roads: Greencastle Five Mile Road Race

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will ensure that Roads Service carries out essential repairs to roads surfaces on the route of the Annual Greencastle 5 Mile Road Race on Monday 26 December, including Crockanboy Road and Mullydoo Road; and that Roads Service proactively engages with the organisers of the Road Race on this matter.
(AQW 5875/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Crockanboy and Greencastle Road portions of the route are considered to be in good condition.

With regard to the Mullydoo Road section, I understand that this was due its cyclic inspection during the week commencing 5 January 2012 however, as in previous years, Roads Service officials have liaised with the race organisers and arranged to inspect it early. It is anticipated that any repairs considered necessary will be carried out before the race date.

Department for Social Development

Boiler Replacement Scheme

Mr Molloy asked the Minister for Social Development how many applications for the Boiler Replacement Scheme have been successful to date.
(AQW 3585/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): Any private sector householder, aged 60 years or over, in receipt of Rate Relief or over 70 and in receipt of Lone Pensioner Allowance but not Housing Benefit and with an existing boiler that is 15 years old or more can apply for the scheme.

At 30 September, 504 application forms from eligible applicants have been received, 114 formal approvals to proceed with replacement works have been issued.

Social Security Agency: Staff

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the religious background of staff in the Social Security Agency in each of the last 20 years.
(AQW 3952/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Recruitment and promotion exercises for General Service posts (i.e. administrators and managers) are managed on a corporate basis by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) through the HRConnect outsourced service. All Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) recruitment and promotion competitions are delivered in line with the Civil Service Commissioners' Recruitment Code and Commissioners' regulate all recruitment to and within the NICS, at all levels, to ensure that the 'merit principle' is adhered to. DFP also provides statutory monitoring returns to the Equality Commission on its workforce composition for the NICS.

The religion of NICS staff is not held. However, as required by the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 (FETO), information is collected on the perceived community background of staff and applicants for posts in the NICS. Using this data, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) has provided information for the past 11 years relating to the Social Security Agency (SSA) in the table below.

NISRA can only provide information annually on the perceived community background of staff from 1 January 2000 to date. Prior to this, the information was only available at Departmental level through published Equal Opportunity Unit Reports. These reports, however, were not collated on an annual basis, but on a 3 yearly cycle.

Year	Total Staffing Numbers	Protestant Numbers %		Roman Catholic Numbers %		Not Determined Numbers %	
2000	4914	2010	40.9	2814	57.3	90	1.8
2001	5360	2158	40.3	3104	57.9	98	1.8
2002	5798	2310	39.8	3391	58.5	97	1.7
2003	5780	2313	40.0	3387	58.6	80	1.4
2004	5946	2372	39.9	3498	58.8	76	1.3
2005	5793	2288	39.5	3430	59.2	75	1.3
2006	5680	2239	39.4	3341	58.8	100	1.8
2007	5518	2193	39.7	3261	59.1	64	1.2
2008	5391	2136	39.6	3179	59.0	76	1.4
2009	5552	2253	40.6	3222	58.0	77	1.4
2010	5767	2374	41.2	3324	57.6	69	1.2
2011	5486	2247	41.0	3174	57.9	65	1.2

Note: All figures relate to permanent staff within the Social Security Agency and includes both full & part time staff i.e. headcount.

Source: Northern Ireland Statistical Research Agency (NISRA). Extracted from HRMS at 1 Jan up to 2008 and from HR Connect from 1 Jan 2009 onwards.

DSD: Public Contracts

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Social Development to list all the current public contracts within his Department, including to whom each contract was awarded; how the contracts were advertised; and when each contract is next due to go out to tender. **(AQW 4256/11-15)**

Mr McCausland: The details requested in respect of contracts are provided in the table below:

Contract	Awarded To	Advertised	Due for Review/Re-Tender
Warm Homes Scheme	Bryson Charitable Group and H & A Mechanical	EU open procurement. European Trade Journals, eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News &News Letter.	July 2012
Organisational review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive	Pricewaterhouse Coopers	EU open procurement. European Trade Journals, eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News &News Letter.	March 2012
Mortgage Debt Advice Service	Housing Rights Service	Non-EU Procurement -open to all suppliers. eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News &News Letter.	March 2013.
Provision of advertising and related services to support Child Maintenance & Enforcement Division in the delivery of its Information and Support Service, 'Choices'	Genesis	EU open procurement. European Trade Journals, eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News &News Letter.	Contract awarded for an initial one year period, commencing November 2011 with the option to extend by two further periods of one year each.

Contract	Awarded To	Advertised	Due for Review/Re-Tender
Survey of child maintenance population in Northern Ireland	Millward Brown Ulster	EU open procurement. European Trade Journals, eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News &News Letter.	Contract awarded for first survey only- due to expire 29.02.2012. Further surveys may be repeated on an annual or bi-annual basis when contract will be re-tendered
Payphones in Child Maintenance & Enforcement Division buildings	BTNI Payphones	Below financial threshold for public advertisement. Procured on basis of selected tenders as per Procurement Control Limits.	September 2012
Pest control	Ecolab	Below financial threshold for public advertisement. Services procured on basis of selected tenders as per Procurement Control Limits.	January 2012
Catering services	Eurest	Non-EU Procurement -open to all suppliers. eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News & News Letter.	March 2012
Hire of courier van	Fleet financial	Below financial threshold for public advertisement. Services procured on basis of selected tenders as per Procurement Control Limits.	May 2012
Air freshener units in toilets of Child Maintenance & Enforcement Division buildings	Initial Washroom Solutions	Below financial threshold for public advertisement. Services procured on basis of selected tenders as per Procurement Control Limits.	October 2012
Sanitary disposal units in toilets of Child Maintenance & Enforcement Division buildings	Initial Washroom Solutions	Below financial threshold for public advertisement. Services procured on basis of selected tenders as per Procurement Control Limits.	January 2013
Ureco toilet service	Ocean Support Services	Below financial threshold for public advertisement. Services procured on basis of selected tenders as per Procurement Control Limits.	April 2012
Dust mat cleaning	PHS	Below financial threshold for public advertisement. Services procured on basis of selected tenders as per Procurement Control Limits.	September 2012
Sanitary bin replacement	PHS	Below financial threshold for public advertisement. Services procured on basis of selected tenders as per Procurement Control Limits.	March 2014
Facilities Management	Serco	EU open procurement. European Trade Journals, eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News & News Letter.	April 2012
Integrated Design Team (Design & Build contract for a Public Realm Scheme – Belfast: Streets Ahead Phase 1 Project)	AECOM, Design & Planning (formerly EDAW)	EU open procurement. European Trade Journals, eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News &News Letter.	September 2013 is contract end date –contract is for the period of the project only - no re-tender.

Contract	Awarded To	Advertised	Due for Review/Re-Tender
Construction (Design & Build contract for a Public Realm Scheme – Belfast: Streets Ahead Phase 1 Project)	Farrans Construction Ltd	EU open procurement. European Trade Journals, eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News & News Letter.	September 2013 is contract end date –contract is for the period of the project only - no re-tender.
Provision of Operational Services at the Lagan Weir.	Quay Marinas	EU open procurement. European Trade Journals, eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News &News Letter.	February 2012
Andersonstown Road Public Realm Environmental Improvement Scheme	F P McCann	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	Standalone Contract- end date unknown at present and will be on completion of construction phase.
Design of Templemore Avenue/Albertbridge Road Public Realm Environmental Improvement Scheme	Hamilton Architects	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	Standalone Contract- end date unknown at present and will be on completion of construction phase.
Anderstown Gateway Masterplan	White, Young Green & Paul Hogarth Company	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	No re-tender. Ongoing and end date unknown at present
Glen Road Development Framework	GVA Grimley & AECOM	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	No re-tender. Ongoing and end date unknown at present
Integrated Design Team (Design & Build contract for a Public Realm Scheme – Bank Square Regeneration Project)	RPS	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	March 2013 is anticipated end date -contract is for period of Public Realm Project — may be extended due to slippage.
Specialist Legal Services for Belfast City Centre Regeneration Directorate	McGrigors LLP	Non-EU Procurement -open to all suppliers. eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News &News Letter.	Due for review August 2012 but may not be renewed.
Property Surveying Services – Laganside managed workspace buildings	O'Connor, Kennedy and Turtle	Non-EU Procurement -open to all suppliers. eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News &News Letter.	Due for review April 2012 but may not be renewed.
Maintenance contract for water feature at Custom House Square Belfast	Chemical Treatment Services Ltd	Non-EU Procurement -open to all suppliers. eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News &News Letter.	May 2012 – option to extend for up to 2 years, year on year, subject to approval.
Provision of Stewarding Services at Custom House Square, Donegal Quay, Lagan Weir and Queen's Quay Belfast	Eventsec	EU Restricted procurement - European Trade Journals, eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News &News Letter.	December 2012
River Lagan Environmental Engineering Consultant	Atkins	Non-EU Procurement -open to all suppliers. eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News &News Letter.	January 2013 - option to extend for 1 year subject to approval.
River Lagan Boat Hire and River Maintenance	Gordon Darragh	Non-EU Procurement -open to all suppliers. eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News &News Letter.	Due for review June 2012 but may not be renewed.

Contract	Awarded To	Advertised	Due for Review/Re-Tender
Masterplan of Greater Clarendon (Sailor town) area. Jointly promoted with the Strategic Investment Board.	GVA Grimley in association with EDAW (now AECOM) Faber Maunsell and Berwin Leighton	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	June 2012 assuming that Masterplan has issued. Contract is for the period of the project only - no re-tender.
Restoration and Reinstatement of steelwork on the SS Nomadic	Harland and Wolff	EU open procurement. European Trade Journals, eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News &News Letter.	December 2011 is contract end date –contract is for the period of the project only - no re-tender.
SS Nomadic Conservation and Restoration ICT services	RPS	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	September 2012 is contract end date –contract is for the period of the project only- no re-tender.
Planning Application for Land at Ballykeel. Ballymena	Hamilton Architects	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	January 2012 is contract end date - may be re-tendered
Monaghan Street and Hill Street Public Realm Scheme, Newry	Hamilton Architects	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	May 2012 is contract end date - may be re-tendered.
South East Coast Masterplan	Scott Wilson	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	June 2012 is contract end date - may be re-tendered.
Coleraine Masterplan	Paul Hogarth Company	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	March 2012 is contract end date –contract is for the period of the project only- no re-tender.
Armagh City Centre Development Sites	Tribal	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	March 2013 is contract end date –contract is for the period of the project only- no re-tender.
Lisburn Development Sites	Scott Wilson	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	March 2013 is contract end date –contract is for the period of the project only- no re-tender.
Portadown/Lurgan Development Sites	Paul Hogarth Company	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	March 2013 is contract end date –contract is for the period of the project only - no re-tender.
Grosvenor Barracks Planning	Tribal	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	End date unknown at present –contract is for the period of the project only - no re-tender.
Dungannon Scotch Street Development Site	Scott Wilson	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	September 2012 is contract end date- contract is for the period of the project only - no re-tender.
Omagh Town Centre Development Sites	Paul Hogarth Company	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	End date unknown at present - contract for period of project only - no re-tender.
Enniskillen Town Centre Master Plan	Scott Wilson	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	March 2012 is contract end date –contract is for the period of the project only - no re-tender.

Contract	Awarded To	Advertised	Due for Review/Re-Tender
Cookstown & Magherafelt Masterplan	Scott Wilson	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	March 2012 is contract end date –contract is for the period of the project only - no re-tender.
Autorek – Cheque Reconciliation	API Software Limited	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	March 2012
Supply of Multi-Function Devices to Social Security Agency.	Xerox	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	May 2016
Courier	DX Courier	EU open procurement. European Trade Journals, eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News &News Letter.	December 2011
Document Storage and Distribution	CDS	EU open procurement. European Trade Journals, eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News &News Letter.	2016
Campaign for Social Security Agency Outreach to Older People	Genesis Advertising	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	May 2012
Support and Assistance for Implementation of Central Payment System	Deloitte	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	May 2012
Medical Support Services Project - Legal Advice	Arthur Cox	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	December 2011 is anticipated contract end date - contract is for the period of the project only.
Medical Support Services Project - Financial Advice	Grant Thornton	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	December 2011 is anticipated contract end date - contract is for the period of the project only.
Medical Support Services Project - IT Accreditation	Sopra	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	December 2011 is anticipated contract end date - contract is for the period of the project only.
Medical Support Services Project - Delivery of Medical Services	Atos Healthcare IT Services UK Ltd	EU open procurement. European Trade Journals, eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News &News Letter.	Contract expires December 2016; re-tender early 2016
Medical Support Services Project - IT Health Check	Sopra	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	December 2011 is anticipated contract end date - contract is for the period of the project only.
Medical Support Services Project - Insurance Advice	Willis Insurance	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	December 2011 is anticipated contract end date - contract is for the period of the project only.
Social Security Agency Innovation Fund for Increasing Benefit Uptake	Advice NI	Non-EU Procurement -open to all suppliers. eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News &News Letter.	June 2012

Contract	Awarded To	Advertised	Due for Review/Re-Tender
Social Security Agency Innovation Fund for Increasing Benefit Uptake	Disability Action	Non-EU Procurement -open to all suppliers. eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News &News Letter.	June 2012
Social Security Agency Innovation Fund for Increasing Benefit Uptake	Larne & District Citizens Advice Bureau	Non-EU Procurement -open to all suppliers. eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News &News Letter.	June 2012
Social Security Agency Innovation fund for increasing benefit uptake	Macmillan Cancer Support	Non-EU Procurement -open to all suppliers. eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News &News Letter.	June 2012
Social Security Agency Innovation Fund for Increasing Benefit Uptake	Vine Centre Ltd	Non-EU Procurement -open to all suppliers. eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News &News Letter.	June 2012
Social Security Agency Benefit Uptake Programme for 2011-2012	Advice NI	Non-EU Procurement -open to all suppliers. eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News &News Letter.	June 2012
Supply & Support of Multi-Function Devices– Employment Support Allowance	Konica Minolta	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	May 2012
Social Security Agency - Carpet Cleaning	Precision Industrial Services	Non-EU Procurement -open tender. eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News & News Letter.	April 2012
House-keeping Services for Andersonstown Jobs & Benefits Office	Mount Charles	Non-EU Procurement -open tender. eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News & News Letter.	December 2012
Provision of House-keeping for James House and Lighthouse	Sodexho	EU open procurement. European Trade Journals, eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News &News Letter.	February 2013
Medical Support Services Agreement	Atos Origin IT Services UK Ltd	Appointment from Central Procurement Division framework	December 2017
Graphic Design and Print Management Services	Navigator Blue Limited	Non-EU procurement. Open tender. eSourcing NI, three local papers – Belfast Telegraph, Irish News & News Letter.	Due for review April 2012 with the option of a further year.

Housing Executive Properties: Double Glazing

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the draft Programme for Government, to detail the criteria that might be used to determine the order in which Housing Executive properties are fitted with double glazing.
(AQW 4864/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Information in relation to the criteria to be used to determine the order in which Housing Executive properties are fitted with double glazing is not yet available.

The Housing Executive's records on the level of double glazing in its stock is incomplete as a number of double glazing schemes were carried out prior to the introduction of computerised recording systems. It is estimated that approximately 50% of the stock already has some degree of double glazing.

The Housing Executive currently installs double glazing as part of its External Cyclical Maintenance programme. Extra funding secured through the monitoring round has enabled an increase in this activity. The Housing Executive is working to identify those

additional properties which still require double glazing. Once this information is available, as required in the draft Programme for Government, by March 2012 it will prepare a programme for the installation of double glazing to all Housing Executive homes by the end of 2015.

Housing Executive Properties: Double Glazing

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development, given the commitment in the Programme for Government consultation document to install double glazing in all Housing Executive properties, to detail (i) the number of properties which do not have double glazing; and (ii) whether the process with include the replacement of existing window frames.
(AQW 4953/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as a number of double glazing schemes were carried out prior to the introduction of computerised recording systems and therefore the Housing Executive's records on the level of double glazing in its stock is incomplete. However, it is estimated that approximately 50% of the stock already has some degree of double glazing.

The Housing Executive currently installs double glazing as part of its External Cyclical Maintenance programme. Extra funding secured through the monitoring round has enabled an increase in this activity. The Housing Executive is working to identify those additional properties which still require double glazing. Once this information is available, as required in the draft Programme for Government, by March 2012 it will prepare a programme for the installation of double glazing to all Housing Executive homes by the end of 2015.

In the past it has been Housing Executive policy to insert double glazing units into existing frames where possible. However, subject to the appropriate approvals, the Housing Executive no longer intends to continue with this policy and where single glazing exists it will be replaced with new frames and double glazing.

Housing Executive Properties: Double Glazing

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of whether the proposed installation of double glazing in all Housing Executive properties (i) is to address the household insulation deficit; or (ii) is to encourage acquisition of these properties as envisaged in PricewaterhouseCoopers' report on the Fundamental Review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.
(AQW 4954/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The proposed installation of double glazing in all Housing Executive properties is to ensure that all tenants enjoy a warm well insulated home that helps tackle some of the causes of fuel poverty. The installation of double glazing in all social housing has been a high priority for me and £2m additional funds was recently secured in the October Monitoring round to enable the Housing Executive to replace single glazed windows with double glazing and additional insulation measures to tackle the thermal efficiency of individual homes.

The Housing Executive currently installs double glazing as part of its External Cyclical Maintenance programme, and is working to identify additional properties which still require double glazing. Once this information is available, as required in the draft Programme for Government, by March 2012 it will prepare a programme for the installation of glazing to all Housing Executive homes by the end of 2015.

Housing Executive Properties: Double Glazing

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the Housing Executive housing estates in the North Down area where the properties within the estates do not have double glazing.
(AQW 4987/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as a number of double glazing schemes were carried out prior to the introduction of computerised recording systems and therefore the Housing Executive's records on the level of double glazing in its stock is incomplete. However, it is estimated that approximately 50% of the stock already has some degree of double glazing. The Housing Executive is working to identify those properties which still require double glazing. Once this information is available, as required in the draft Programme for Government, by March 2012 it will prepare a programme for the installation of glazing to all Housing Executive homes by the end of 2015.

Housing Associations: Waiting/Transfer Lists

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development (i) whether the Housing Association has a statutory responsibility to inform tenants of any changes to rules regarding waiting/transfer lists; (ii) if not, will he review how the Housing Associations communicate this information to their tenants and those on waiting/transfer lists; and (iii) whether he will consider instructing Housing Associations to keep local MLAs and District Councils up to date with any changes to the rules.
(AQW 5029/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Social housing waiting and transfer lists are administered by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive through the Housing Selection Scheme. Details of the rules regarding the Housing Selection Scheme are available on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive website. Changes to the rules are published on the website.

There is no statutory obligation on the Housing Executive to consult with applicants on the waiting/transfer lists.

Housing Associations operate their waiting transfer lists in accordance with the Housing Selection Scheme.

There are no plans to require the Housing Associations to contact applicants about any changes to the rules.

Housing Executive Properties: Double Glazing

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development to detail how many Housing Executive properties in the Mid Ulster area are in need of double glazed window units.
(AQW 5172/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as a number of double glazing schemes were carried out prior to the introduction of computerised recording systems and therefore the Housing Executive's records on the level of double glazing in its stock is incomplete. However, it is estimated that approximately 50% of the stock already has some degree of double glazing.

The Housing Executive currently installs double glazing as part of its External Cyclical Maintenance programme. Extra funding secured through the monitoring round has enabled an increase in this activity. The Housing Executive is working to identify those additional properties which still require double glazing. Once this information is available, as required in the draft Programme for Government, by March 2012 it will prepare a programme for the installation of double glazing to all Housing Executive homes by the end of 2015.

The Mid Ulster constituency includes the Housing Executive's Magherafelt and Cookstown District Office areas and a small part of their Dungannon District Office area. In Magherafelt a window replacement scheme has already commenced during the current financial year for 84 properties and a second scheme is due to commence later this financial year for 161 properties. In Cookstown a window replacement scheme is due to commence this financial year for 61 properties. There are no schemes planned for the Dungannon District Office area at this stage.

Housing Benefit

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of Housing Benefit single person claimants in the 25-35 age bracket, within the Strabane District Council area, who will have the rate of their benefit reduced with effect from 1 January 2012, as a result of the decision to implement Statutory Rule 2011/293.
(AQW 5214/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has identified 61 current claimants in the 25-35 age bracket in the Strabane District Council area who would be affected by the change in legislation and they have written to each claimant individually. The claimants will not necessarily have their claim adjusted on 1 January 2012. The date on which their claim will be affected will vary depending on the review date for their claim, which is on the anniversary of their original claim date, and whether or not their Housing benefit rate was being transitionally protected following the last change in legislation which was introduced in April 2011. Each of the claimants who received a letter will have been advised of the date specific to their claim.

Shared Future

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development (i) to outline the measures he has taken since coming into office. or plans to take, to promote a shared future; and (ii) whether he will consider implementing a policy appraisal whereby his Department will screen and policy-proof all policies and spending decisions for the impact on good relations and the creation of a shared future.
(AQW 5221/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

(i) Since coming into office I have been considering how to enhance the performance and delivery of the different parts of my Department through better collaboration and co-ordination, for example between housing and urban regeneration. A key part of this development process is how we deliver shared future outcomes. Over the coming months I will be making my position clear on how I intend to take this forward.

(ii) My Department, in accordance with the Northern Ireland Act 1998, fulfils the statutory duty to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. The promotion of equality and good relations is therefore a consideration in the development of all my Department's policies and spending decisions. My Department will also take account of any mainstreaming and good relations considerations in relation to policy development and resource allocation that emerge as part of the development of the final Cohesion, Sharing and Integration strategy.

Energy Efficiency

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 4427/11-15, when the review of his Department's approach to improving domestic energy efficiency for owner occupiers and the private rented sector will be completed.
(AQW 5270/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I have asked officials to review my Department's approach to improving domestic energy efficiency in owner occupied and privately rented homes in the future. This review will examine how we target resources and will include an assessment of the most appropriate energy efficiency improvement measures.

The review will commence in January 2012 and should be completed by summer 2012. The evaluation of the pilot Boiler Replacement Scheme will also form part of the review. My Department has also commissioned Professor Christine Liddell to carry out additional research to help identify areas of high fuel poverty prevalence which will assist targeting of resources.

Housing Associations: Under-occupied Properties

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of housing association properties that are currently under occupied.
(AQW 5294/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is not currently available as housing associations do not collect information on changing household composition. Until now, there has been no reason for them to do so as this does not have any impact on the level of rent charged.

The Government's ongoing reform of the Welfare System will impact directly on households under-occupying social homes and work is currently underway to identify what the implications will be for Northern Ireland's social tenants.

Housing Executive Properties: Double Glazing

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the Housing Executive housing estates in the Strangford constituency where properties within the estate do not have double glazing.
(AQW 5305/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as a number of double glazing schemes were carried out prior to the introduction of computerised recording systems and therefore the Housing Executive's records on the level of double glazing in its stock is incomplete. However, it is estimated that approximately 50% of the stock already has some degree of double glazing.

The Housing Executive currently installs double glazing as part of its External Cyclical Maintenance programme. Extra funding secured through the monitoring round has enabled an increase in this activity. The Housing Executive is working to identify those additional properties which still require double glazing. Once this information is available, as required in the draft Programme for Government, by March 2012 it will prepare a programme for the installation of double glazing to all Housing Executive homes by the end of 2015.

The Strangford constituency includes the Housing Executive's Newtownards District and parts of their Downpatrick and Castlereagh District Office areas. In the Newtownards District a window replacement scheme is due to commence this financial year for 316 properties in the Glen Estate and also includes some individual properties in Comber. There are no schemes planned for the Downpatrick or Castlereagh District Office areas at this stage.

Comber: Town Centre Redevelopment

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the redevelopment of Comber town centre.
(AQW 5306/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department is working with the Steering Group established by Ards Borough Council to take forward a traffic improvement and public realm scheme in Castle Street with a view to implementing a scheme in 2013/2014, subject to funding being available and all necessary approvals.

Panel of Benefit Appeal Tribunals

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 4187/11-15, to detail the positions and the annual salaries of each of the two full-time salaried members on the panel of benefit appeal tribunals.
(AQW 5316/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The positions held by the two full-time salaried members are President of Appeal Tribunals and Legal Chairman of Appeal Tribunals. Their respective annual salaries for the 2011-12 financial year, as determined in accordance with recommendations by the Senior Salaries Review Body, are set out in the following table:

Position	Total Annual Salary (including estimated employer's National Insurance & accrued superannuation liability costs)
President of Appeal Tribunals	£186,272
Legal Chairman of Appeal Tribunals	£148,835

Benefit Appeal Tribunals: Members' Training

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development what training members on the panel of benefit appeal tribunals receive in relation to issues of (i) alcohol and drugs dependency; and (ii) mental health to prepare them for hearing appeals and addressing appellants.
(AQW 5317/11-15)

Mr McCausland: An appeal tribunal is an independent judicial body and therefore neither the tribunal, nor the training of tribunal members, falls within my responsibility as Minister for Social Development. Under Schedule 1 of the Social Security (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, the training of tribunal members is a statutory function of the President of Appeal Tribunals. The President, Mr Conall MacLynn, can be contacted directly at: Office of the President of Appeal Tribunals, 6th Floor, Cleaver House, 3 Donegall Square North, Belfast BT1 5GA.

Disability Living Allowance: Motability Scheme

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are currently in receipt of the higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance; and of these, how many have availed of a motability scheme car.
(AQW 5318/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There were 96,274 people in receipt of the higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance at 27 November 2011, the most recent figure available.

My department does not hold information on how many people who receive the higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance decide to avail of the motability scheme. The administrative arrangements in place to support people who avail of the scheme are on an individual customer's record and the Department for Work & Pensions IT system that is used to administer Disability Living Allowance does not hold information on the total number of people who have availed of the scheme.

The Motability Scheme, whereby people who receive the higher rate mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance may exchange all or part of their allowance in return for a car, is administered by the independent charity Motability. Information on the number of motability customers can be obtained from Motability by writing to: Declan O'Mahony, Director, Motability, Warwick House, Roydon Road, Harlow and Essex, CM19 5PX.

Fuel Poverty: Pay-as-you-go Oil Pilot Scheme

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) how the pay-as-you-go oil pilot scheme to address fuel poverty will operate; (ii) how it differs from the Oil Stamp Scheme introduced by Local Government; and (iii) whether it is intended to replace the Oil Stamp Scheme.
(AQW 5354/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I recently announced my department's intention to pilot a Pay as You Go for oil in conjunction with Kingspan Environmental and Carillion Energy Supplies. The technology developed by Kingspan Environmental will link to the PayPoint and allow householders to purchase a voucher in the same way that can be done for gas and electricity.

There are still some issues to be resolved before the pilot will commence however, I am confident that the pilot will go ahead early in the New Year and that approximately 20 homes, across all tenures, will be involved in the pilot. If the pilot is successful it is hoped that this will discourage householders from purchasing emergency drums of oils which cost significantly more per litre than larger fills of oil.

The Oil Stamp Saving Schemes are an excellent tool to help households budget for fuel and it is not intended that this pilot will replace the oil stamp schemes. However, I recognise that many people find it difficult to save for stamps when the urgently need oil and therefore resort to purchasing emergency drums. I would hope that the pilot will complement the work done through Oil Stamp Savings Scheme and I would encourage householders to avail of these schemes if available in their area.

Small Pockets of Deprivation Programme

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development (i) for his Departments assessment of the Small Pockets of Deprivation Programme; and (ii) to detail his proposals for continuing the programme post March 2012.
(AQW 5355/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I recognise that the communities which have benefitted from the Small Pockets of Deprivation (SPOD) programme believe that it has made a positive contribution to their areas. However, it has been difficult to establish clear evidence of the programme's impact. From a number of evaluations already carried out it is clear that the programme had been of greatest value where it had been able to assist work already taking place in the target areas and where relatively strong community based groups existed and were able to make good use of the funding opportunity.

I can confirm that funding has been made available in my Department's budget for the SPOD programme up to 31 March 2015 and that I have no plans at present to change the way in which funding is allocated. However, I want to ensure that the funding delivers the best possible impact in the target areas. Therefore, I have asked the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, which implements the SPOD programme on behalf of my Department, to work with the communities in the SPOD areas to identify the priority issues in each area and work up projects to address those issues. I expect the NIHE to report back before the end of March 2012.

Social Housing

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail, in respect of each constituency, the points required for an applicant for social housing to obtain a two or three bedroom house.
(AQW 5368/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested. The Housing Executive does not allocate properties at a certain points level and it is therefore not possible to advise how many points are required to be allocated a 2/3 bedroom house as it will vary, depending on the number of people on the Waiting List, the level of points they have been awarded and the scale and nature of turnover in any particular area. The circumstances surrounding this will vary from day to day. For example, someone could therefore be offered a two bedroom house in a particular locality today at 200 points and tomorrow another two bedroom house could be allocated to an applicant who has just come on the list and been awarded 290 points.

The allocation of social housing in Northern Ireland is governed by the Rules of the Housing Selection Scheme as follows:-

Rule 46 – The General Rule: All applicants will be assessed and placed on a Waiting List which is used by all Participating Landlords. As a general rule each dwelling will be offered to the relevant Applicant with the highest points.

Rule 47 – The General Rule: In the present context an Applicant is a "relevant applicant" if: –

1 He/she has applied for, or is deemed to have applied for accommodation with the locational and other characteristics of the dwelling in question, and

2 The landlord is satisfied, on reasonable grounds, that the non-locational characteristics of the dwelling meet the Applicant's needs, and having regard to all of the circumstances, do not substantially surpass those needs.

Social Housing: Newbuilds

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development how many social housing properties need to be built in each of the next three years to meet the demand of the sector.
(AQW 5369/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The need for social housing was considered in the 'Northern Ireland Housing Market Review & Perspectives 2011 – 2014' report which was recently published by the Housing Executive.

In this they assess that a minimum of 1900 new social dwellings are required each year to meet the ongoing needs of a growing population with a further 600 new homes needed each year to address a backlog built up since 2001.

They also note the waiting list has fallen for a second successive year so whilst we have never built to this level of theoretical need, it is clear other interventions in the housing market are making an impact on the statistics.

Whilst building new social housing is an important tool to addressing housing need it is not the only answer. We must look to provide realistic alternatives for those who may be able to avail of them. For example, I want to do more to protect those already renting privately, making the Private Rented sector an attractive alternative for those who can not or do not want to access social housing. I also want to increase the availability of affordable housing and my recent support for Co-Ownership will help more first time buyers than ever before access affordable home ownership. Finally I believe that actively tackling the issue of empty homes offers a real opportunity to make more housing available.

We need a holistic solution to address what is a complex range of housing need and that is why I plan to bring forward in the coming months a new housing strategy that will cover a wider range of issues than ever before, each designed to create more choice, opportunity and access to a more meaningful housing solution to meet the wider demands of those in housing need.

Housing Executive Properties

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) how many properties the Housing Executive owns; and of these how many (a) do not have double glazing in every window; (ii) do not have cavity wall insulation; and (iii) do not have loft insulation.
(AQW 5371/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive currently owns 89,828 dwellings. In relation to double glazing, cavity wall insulation and loft insulation, this information is not available in the format requested as many such installation schemes were carried out prior to the introduction of computerised recording systems and therefore the Housing Executive's records are incomplete. However, it is estimated that approximately 50% of the Housing Executive's stock has some degree of double glazing.

The Housing Executive implemented a major programme to install cavity wall insulation in the mid to late 1980s and consequently the 2009 House Condition Survey indicated that only 5.2% of the Housing Executive's stock had no wall insulation. This is largely in non-traditional property types which do not have cavity walls and this is being addressed through alternative means of insulation.

Loft insulation has been installed through a combination of External Cyclical Maintenance and other schemes. Again the 2009 House Condition Survey indicated that only 1.2% of Housing Executive homes had no loft insulation and this will be addressed by subsequent cyclical schemes.

The Housing Executive currently installs double glazing as part of its External Cyclical Maintenance programme. Extra funding secured through the monitoring round has enabled an increase in this activity. The Housing Executive is working to identify those additional properties which still require double glazing. Once this information is available, as required in the draft Programme for Government, by March 2012 it will prepare a programme for the installation of glazing to all Housing Executive homes by the end of 2015.

Benefit Recipients

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are in receipt of (i) Employment and Support Allowance; (ii) Incapacity Benefit; (iii) Severe Disablement Allowance; (iv) Disability Living Allowance; (v) Income Support; (vi) Attendance Allowance; (vii) Pension Credit; and (viii) Housing Benefit, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 5380/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is set out in the tables below. Due to system configuration these figures are rounded to the nearest ten.

Table 1: Recipients of Employment and Support Allowance, Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance, Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance by Assembly Area at May 2011

Assembly Area	Employment & Support Allowance	Incapacity Benefit	Severe Disablement Allowance	Disability Living Allowance	Attendance Allowance
Belfast East	1,070	2,630	460	8,850	3,590
Belfast North	1,930	4,060	660	14,780	3,940
Belfast South	1,040	2,370	490	8,340	3,240
Belfast West	1,860	3,850	680	17,420	2,510
East Antrim	1,010	2,420	420	7,240	2,750
East Londonderry	1,370	3,070	540	8,290	3,220
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	1,130	2,450	590	9,200	3,340
Foyle	1,530	4,190	690	13,630	2,230
Lagan Valley	960	2,370	430	7,700	3,030
Mid Ulster	1,360	3,230	540	10,160	2,940
Newry And Armagh	1,350	3,430	790	12,090	3,420
North Antrim	1,350	2,980	590	8,400	3,490
North Down	750	1,930	430	6,190	3,370
South Antrim	1,000	2,420	630	7,890	2,520
South Down	1,430	3,270	680	10,930	3,180
Strangford	960	2,400	360	7,410	2,750
Upper Bann	1,580	4,240	560	12,720	3,370
West Tyrone	1,250	3,560	730	12,760	2,710
Unknown	170	400	160	1,360	630
Total	**23,100**	**55,260**	**10,390**	**185,370**	**56,220**

Data source MIDAS/GMS scans May 2011

Table 2: Recipients of Income Support and Pension Credit at May 2011 and Housing Benefit at April 2011 by Assembly Area

Assembly Area	Income Support	Pension Credit	Housing Benefit
Belfast East	3,920	4,920	8,810
Belfast North	8,400	7,570	16,930
Belfast South	3,900	4,200	9,050

Assembly Area	Income Support	Pension Credit	Housing Benefit
Belfast West	9,960	7,190	14,630
East Antrim	2,830	4,120	6,430
East Londonderry	4,200	5,520	8,620
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	3,420	5,520	6,360
Foyle	8,190	6,070	14,900
Lagan Valley	2,670	4,050	5,830
Mid Ulster	3,840	5,640	5,990
Newry And Armagh	5,040	6,500	8,190
North Antrim	3,710	5,800	8,090
North Down	2,260	3,630	5,400
South Antrim	2,820	3,850	5,390
South Down	4,140	5,380	7,200
Strangford	2,380	4,180	5,780
Upper Bann	4,920	6,310	9,890
West Tyrone	5,120	5,850	8,520
Unknown	580	930	790
Total	**82,300**	**97,210**	**156,800**

Data source MIDAS/GMS scans May 2011 and Housing Benefit claimant data at April 2011

Regional Infrastructure Support Programme

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development with which stakeholders he has held discussions regarding the proposed changes to the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme.
(AQW 5385/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Since I announced the proposed changes to the Regional Support Programme I have met with representatives from CO3 and also with a small delegation representing all of the organisations currently funded under the existing programme. This delegation consisted of representatives from Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, Citizens Advice Bureau and Community Evaluation Northern Ireland.

Social Housing Properties: uPVC Window Frames

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) his Department's; and (ii) the Housing Associations' policy in relation to the use of uPVC window frames in social housing properties.
(AQW 5386/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department does not have a policy in relation to the use of "uPVC" window frames but does provide guidance to Housing Associations on Government procurement policy which requires that all public procurement is on the basis of value for money. Best Value for Money is defined as: "The most advantageous combination of whole life costs, quality and sustainability to meet the customer requirements." In this context, cost means consideration of the whole life cost; quality means meeting a specification which is fit for purpose and sufficient to meet the customer's requirements; and sustainability means economic, social and environmental benefit.

The social housing development programme requires that all new 'new build' self-contained schemes must meet the Code for Sustainable Homes rating level '3 stars' or better. The Code was developed to drive a step-change in sustainable building practice for new homes. It is a standard for key elements of design and construction which affect the sustainability of a new home. The Code measures the sustainability of a new home against nine design categories rating the 'whole home' home as a complete package.

The Materials category aims to encourage responsible sourcing of materials with lower environmental impacts over their lifecycle. Materials are rated on a scale from A+ to E, with A+ having the lowest overall environmental impact in accordance with "The Green Guide to specification" published by the Building Research Establishment. PVC-U windows score an overall "A" rating for domestic windows and PVC-U is a material that can be recycled again and again.

Lenadoon Avenue, Belfast: Double Glazing

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development whether the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has any plans to replace the windows in Numbers 150 to 172 Lenadoon Avenue, Belfast with double glazing.
(AQW 5432/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has confirmed to me that the dwellings referred to are included in a window replacement scheme which is due to go on site in February 2012.

Rinalea Gardens, Lenadoon, Belfast: Double Glazing

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development when the Northern Ireland Housing Executive will install double glazed windows in properties in Rinalea Gardens, Lenadoon, Belfast.
(AQW 5433/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has confirmed to me that the dwellings referred to are included in a window replacement scheme which is due to go on site in February 2012.

Housing Executive: Redecoration Grants

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister for Social Development how much the Housing Executive has paid out in redecoration grants in each of the last five years, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 5434/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not routinely collate information by Parliamentary constituency. However, the table attached gives details of how much the Housing Executive has paid out in redecoration grants in each of the last five years, broken down by their District Offices.

District Office	2006/07		2007/08		2008/09		2009/10		2010/11	
	Number of Payments	Cost (£)	Number of Payments	Cost (£)	Number of Payments	Cost (£)	Number of Payments	Cost (£)	Number of Payments	Cost (£)
Belfast West	632	218,961	1,041	304,041	520	177,714	284	114,852	799	265,191
Belfast East	375	182,225	340	81,538	339	128,837	156	46,449	370	93,125
Belfast North	1041	296,113	1,207	421,043	268	69,946	849	233,530	667	166,775
Belfast Shankill	920	336,558	410	119,251	680	208,865	471	234,245	375	164,540
Belfast South	606	167,114	558	192,984	512	161,350	146	42,066	135	76,087
Bangor	567	153,403	300	93,354	312	103,274	166	46,187	170	70,926
Newtownards	732	223,717	306	79,935	284	87,110	428	120,624	362	97,300
Castlereagh	470	141,556	502	121,798	352	116,043	385	93,209	205	49,687
Lisburn Antrim Street	338	107,187	501	145,330	303	77,912	384	102,543	259	92,351
Lisburn Dairyfarm	264	52,072	406	123,523	66	20,880	228	54,451	117	46,927
Downpatrick	423	94,861	242	58,026	162	41,432	197	59,164	367	116,853
Banbridge	300	80,299	314	79,658	232	65,304	243	78,599	271	51,234
Newry	457	161,444	492	126,088	203	63,617	233	74,912	313	91,663
Armagh	286	83,233	299	86,878	128	37,589	73	29,763	154	36,471
Lurgan	441	117437	328	138,011	336	107,368	369	111,618	299	80,559
Portadown	178	55,937	51	18,870	210	83,929	104	23,714	229	79,976
Dungannon	334	101,263	181	66,791	225	76,190	112	35,698	274	92,358
Fermanagh	390	94,859	395	102,243	374	86,327	240	65,087	240	59,900
Ballymena	383	125,273	251	59,895	129	45,859	153	28,742	285	133,630

District Office	2006/07		2007/08		2008/09		2009/10		2010/11	
	Number of Payments	Cost (£)	Number of Payments	Cost (£)	Number of Payments	Cost (£)	Number of Payments	Cost (£)	Number of Payments	Cost (£)
Antrim	371	106,022	454	95,368	493	159,916	406	210,731	329	82,680
Newtownabbey 1	241	80,146	219	59,335	213	81,304	244	61,887	148	74,865
Newtownabbey 2	262	52,292	312	88,932	103	39,138	221	88,313	198	29,980
Carrickfergus	445	110,829	89	24,712	77	35,863	68	35,549	93	22,232
Larne	198	48,152	265	61,192	103	27,504	61	19,173	187	50,826
Ballycastle	104	22,196	91	28,734	110	44,516	16	7,221	9	2,695
Ballymoney	234	67,664	268	72,579	98	26,402	69	14,366	124	55,423
Coleraine	512	164,185	393	117,930	449	105,040	221	47,868	145	29,248
Waterloo	307	105,859	356	144,006	234	84,659	160	54,006	334	98,003
Waterside	470	155,934	321	71,406	435	178,321	321	110,495	235	101,202
Collon Terrace	511	154,340	568	200,162	588	139,071	263	128,638	377	143,958
Limavady	277	80,114	222	60,588	65	22,913	101	33,914	185	59,590
Magherafelt	250	70,635	287	67,128	240	111,127	103	27,447	20	11,206
Strabane	509	175,482	399	150,742	191	61,741	272	107,660	50	25,760
Omagh	493	164,426	311	86,937	112	22,509	202	57,956	233	92,969
Cookstown	140	61,174	274	63,353	78	13,014	128	27,269	58	20,970
Total	**14,461**	**4,412,962**	**12,953**	**3,812,360**	**9,224**	**2,912,585**	**8,077**	**2,627,946**	**8,616**	**2,767,159**

Benefit Fraud: Convictions

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been convicted of benefit fraud in each of the last three years, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 5474/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested. However, the total number of convictions in each of the last three years is shown in the table below.

Financial Year	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011
Number of Convictions	530	455	542

Shared Spaces Schemes: Blind or Partially-sighted People

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what consultation his Department has had, or intends to have, with groups representing people who are blind or partially sighted in relation to shared surface schemes.
(AQW 5492/11-15)

Mr McCausland: DSD Schemes continue to be led by DRD in the area of road management. All of our regeneration proposals, which are professionally designed, are required to be to Roads Service standard and require approval from DRD prior to the commencement of works. All schemes are Equality Assessed and involve thorough consultation with an array of interest groups and organisations representing, among others, people with disabilities.

The Londonderry City Centre Public Realm Scheme, which was completed in November 2010, includes surfaces that are shared between pedestrians and vehicles. DSD consulted widely with all interested parties including organisations representing disabled people prior to commencing implementation of this project.

The consultation process was conducted through public exhibitions of the scheme proposals, public meetings, establishment of a dedicated web page with an electronic feedback facility, distribution of information leaflets and face to face meetings with

individuals and organisations. All views and concerns expressed were taken account of as far as possible in arriving at the final scheme design.

A disability audit of the final scheme design proposals was carried out by Disability Action. Whilst generally welcoming the scheme, the audit suggested a number of actions to make the area more user friendly for disabled people. These included recommendations on kerb lines, paving patterns, parking and drop-off facilities, crossing points, street furniture and bus stops. These recommendations have also been taken account of as far as possible in the construction of the scheme.

My Department is aware that Roads Service colleagues meet regularly with organisations representing disabled people in Londonderry and will continue to review the operation of the new public realm scheme now that it has been handed over to the Department for Regional Development.

There are at present, however, no other immediate plans for any shared surface schemes in Northern Ireland within our remit of Urban Regeneration.

Income Gap

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the income gap between the most wealthy and the least wealthy; and how this compares to the rest of Europe.
(AQW 5539/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Published figures from the annual Northern Ireland Households Below Average Income series show weekly median incomes for those in the top 20% of the United Kingdom income distribution compared to those in the bottom 20%, in Northern Ireland (NI) and the United Kingdom (UK). See tables 1 and 2 below.

On a Before Housing Costs (BHC) basis, in 2009/10, individuals in Northern Ireland in the top 20% of the UK income distribution had a weekly household income 4.0 times higher than the bottom 20%. Median weekly household income (BHC), in 2009/10, for the top 20% of the UK income distribution in Northern Ireland was £827, for the bottom 20% the figure was £207.

On an After Housing Costs (AHC) basis, in 2009/10, individuals in Northern Ireland in the top 20% of the UK income distribution had a weekly household income 4.8 times higher than the bottom 20%. Median weekly household income (AHC), in 2009/10, for the top 20% of the UK income distribution in Northern Ireland was £753, for the bottom 20% the figure was £158.

The Department for Social Development does not produce figures which will show a direct comparison with the rest of Europe. However, figures are produced which show a comparison within the UK on an AHC basis. (See table 2)

Table 1:

Money Values of Quintile Medians in Average 2009/10 Prices, for Northern Ireland based on the United Kingdom income distribution

(£ per week, equivalised)						Source: FRS
	Quintile group medians					Ratio of Top to Bottom Quintile Medians
	Quintile 1 (Bottom 20%)	Quintile 2	Quintile 3	Quintile 4	Quintile 5 (Top 20%)	
Before Housing Costs						
2002/03	192	295	397	517	739	3.8
2003/04	196	292	390	515	734	3.7
2004/05	202	303	404	519	765	3.8
2005/06	204	298	410	537	800	3.9
2006/07	201	305	399	546	789	3.9
2007/08	199	300	403	536	798	4.0
2008/09	198	304	408	532	803	4.1
2009/10	207	312	405	543	827	4.0
After Housing Costs						
2002/03	147	243	339	456	663	4.5
2003/04	152	240	348	461	652	4.3
2004/05	159	251	351	459	695	4.4

(£ per week, equivalised)						Source: FRS
	Quintile group medians					Ratio of Top to Bottom Quintile Medians
	Quintile 1 (Bottom 20%)	Quintile 2	Quintile 3	Quintile 4	Quintile 5 (Top 20%)	
2005/06	161	247	355	473	709	4.4
2006/07	162	255	348	484	716	4.4
2007/08	151	251	358	481	727	4.8
2008/09	149	251	358	483	746	5.0
2009/10	158	251	350	488	753	4.8

Notes:

1. All estimates are subject to sampling error

Table 2: Money Values of Quintile Medians in Average 2009/10 Prices, for United Kingdom based on the United Kingdom income distribution

(£ per week, equivalised)						Source: FRS
	Quintile group medians					Ratio of Top to Bottom Quintile Medians
	Quintile 1 (Bottom 20%)	Quintile 2	Quintile 3	Quintile 4	Quintile 5 (Top 20%)	
Before Housing Costs						
2002/03	197	292	396	524	803	4.1
2003/04	198	294	396	527	796	4.0
2004/05	203	299	400	532	806	4.0
2005/06	202	300	403	538	818	4.0
2006/07	199	300	405	538	825	4.1
2007/08	198	301	406	541	833	4.2
2008/09	202	305	409	547	848	4.2
2009/10	208	310	413	550	849	4.1
After Housing Costs						
2002/03	148	240	341	460	711	4.8
2003/04	147	245	344	464	716	4.9
2004/05	153	251	348	470	730	4.8
2005/06	150	251	353	479	745	5.0
2006/07	147	251	355	479	753	5.1
2007/08	145	252	357	486	762	5.3
2008/09	143	251	354	489	769	5.4
2009/10	145	252	356	488	772	5.3

Notes:

1. All estimates are subject to sampling error

Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Programme

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development. pursuant to AQW 4482/11-15, to detail (i) the level of funding Pobal has received under the Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Programme in each of the last three years; (ii) when the funding was allocated; (ii) for what purpose the funding was allocated; and (iv) the duration of the funding.
(AQW 5564/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is set out in the table.

(i)

2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
£37,325.27	£37,325.27	£36,092.00

(ii) The funding for the 2009/10 and 2010/11 financial years was issued under one contract for funding in March 2009. The funding for the 2011/12 financial year was issued under one contract for funding in April 2011.

(iii) The funding has been awarded for running costs to facilitate the delivery of a range of social, economic, and educational projects to address priorities for action set out in the Greater Falls Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plan.

(iv) The current contract for funding with Pobal ends on 31 March 2012.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development why Pay Related Social Insurance contributions, that are paid in the Republic of Ireland, are not taken into consideration when people from the Republic of Ireland move to Northern Ireland and apply for the contribution-based Job Seeker's Allowance.
(AQW 5568/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The social security rights of people moving within the European Union are governed by Regulation (EC) No 883/2004. Under those rules, insurance contributions paid in another Member State may be taken into consideration for the purposes of contribution-based Jobseeker's Allowance if the person concerned has worked and paid national insurance contributions in the UK since moving here.

Caravans: Rental Charges

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development, under the Caravans Act (NI) 2011, whether caravan site owners are allowed to charge different levels of rent for Park Homes and Willerby caravans.
(AQW 5670/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The level of rent or pitch fee as it is known, is a matter for agreement between the site owner and the resident. It is possible that a site owner may charge different levels of pitch fees to different residents depending on the size of the pitch, the size of the unit, whether it is a Park Home or a Caravan, the scenery etc.

My Department has responsibility for the Caravans Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 as it applies to the residential sector i.e. those who live in a caravan as their main home. The legislation requires that a written statement is drawn up and agreed between the site owner and the resident and must include among other things the amount of the rent being charged for the pitch on which the caravan is sited and the date on which the rent will be reviewed each year.

The legislation contains a presumption that the pitch fee shall change by a percentage no more than any percentage change in the retail prices index since the last review date.

Vacant Properties

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Social Development if there are any grants available to assist rate payers who own vacant properties and wish to make improvements to bring them up to living standard.
(AQW 5683/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The economic downturn has resulted in a significantly reduced level of grants funding. Grant aid is currently being approved for mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants for adapting private properties to meet the needs of disabled people and Repairs Grants on the foot of statutory notices. Discretionary grants, which deal with major renovation and repair, are currently only being approved in exceptional circumstances. The criteria for exceptional circumstances are generally that the property represents a significant health and safety risk to the occupants. Therefore, as vacant properties are not occupied, discretionary grant aid is currently not available under the exceptional circumstances criteria.

Within Town Centre Living Initiative Areas grant aid is available on a very limited basis for vacant properties where the statutory application was received prior to May 2011.

My Department is currently considering two pilots which will be used to test the appropriateness and effectiveness of various approaches to tackling empty homes.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Parliament Buildings: Digital Switchover

Mr Flanagan asked the Assembly Commission what plans are in place in Parliament Buildings for the digital switchover, the turning off of analogue transmitters and the continuing provision of RTÉ and TG4.
(AQW 4895/11-15)

Mr McElduff (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly uses digital input signals for the majority of the channels available on the internal TV distribution system. According to Digital UK, the British and Irish Governments will ensure that RTÉ1, RTÉ2 and TG4 will be made available on digital terrestrial television before the analogue transmitters are switched off in October 2012. The Assembly will provide access to these digital channels within Parliament Buildings once they become available.

Parliament Buildings: Leisure Facilities

Mr Flanagan asked the Assembly Commission what leisure facilities are available to staff and Members who are based in Parliament Buildings.
(AQW 5173/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Commission recognises the benefits of a healthy workforce and is currently developing a Health and Wellbeing Strategy to help promote that aim.

Although there are currently no leisure facilities in Parliament Buildings, there are shower and changing facilities available for building users who may wish to jog or run in the grounds of the estate.

Building users can also avail of the leisure facilities in the Maynard Sinclair Pavilion on the Stormont Estate.

Due to restraints on space and budget the Commission is not currently in a position to provide leisure facilities in Parliament Buildings.

MLA: Pension Entitlement

Mr Campbell asked the Assembly Commission to detail the pension entitlement of an MLA who has been elected since 1998 and served as an office holder with an additional remuneration in 1999/00 of £6,525, 2000/01 of £28,252, and with an anticipated office holder remuneration in 2011/12 of £71,433.96 and 2012/13 of £71,433.96, assuming the MLA salary remains at the current £43,101.00 per annum.
(AQW 5339/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): In order to perform an indicative pension calculation to illustrate the above scenario, the following assumptions have been made:

- The MLA is not currently, nor has been a dual mandate member (i.e. has not been paid as a Westminster MP);
- From 1 April 2009, the MLA moved to the higher personal contribution rate of 11.5% of salary (from 6.0% of salary prior to 1 April 2009);
- A last day of service of 31 March 2013 has been used for calculation purposes;
- The Officeholder remuneration is payable for the entirely of the relevant financial years;
- The pension illustrated is payable at age 65; and
- All other details are as stated in the question.

At 31 March 2013, an MLA elected in June 1998 would have 10 years and 261 days reckonable service at the lower accrual rate and 3 years 359 days at the higher rate, giving a Member's pension entitlement of £13,529 per annum. In addition, the office holder pension entitlement would be worth £4,412 per annum. Therefore, the MLA would have a total pension entitlement of £17,941 per annum at age 65. It should be recognised that these figures are indicative and would require confirmation prior to the MLA's retirement.

Stormont Estate: Car Parking

Mr Hussey asked the Assembly Commission to detail why there are inadequate car parking facilities for staff and visitors.
(AQO 960/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Commission is aware of the difficulties being experienced with car parking, most notably on Monday and Tuesdays. During the summer recess the Assembly, in conjunction with the Department of Finance and Personnel, created an overflow facility adjacent to the Lower East car park primarily for use on plenary sitting days. Along with minor alterations to the parking layout in the Lower East car park, these proposals created approximately 44 additional parking spaces for building users.

This has significantly improved the situation and car park user feedback has been very positive. The Commission appreciates however that it may still be necessary for some people to park on the Prince of Wales and Massey Avenues on sitting days. The situation will be kept under regular review by Facilities Directorate.

Parliament Buildings: Irish Language

Ms J McCann asked the Assembly Commission how it intends to implement measures to address the needs of the Irish language community in Parliament Buildings.
(AQO 967/11-15)

Mrs Cochrane (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): A draft language policy was initially presented to the Assembly Commission in March 2010.It was agreed that the draft policy would be taken by the Parties for further consideration. A further amended version of the draft policy was re-presented for the Parties to consider in June 2010.

Following further discussions at the Assembly Commission meeting in November 2011 it was agreed that further consideration would be given in relation to the draft language policy in anticipation of a final agreed language policy being presented to the Commission at their meeting of 24 January 2012.

The Assembly Commission will remain mindful of its statutory obligations while taking the draft language policy into consideration.

Assembly Committees: Documents

Mrs D Kelly asked the Assembly Commission for an update on the proposal to enable committee members to access committee papers through electronic tablets and iPads.
(AQO 972/11-15)

Mr Cree (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): At present committee teams compile paper packs for use by members. As part of developing service to committees, a survey was carried out to determine members' attitudes to the introduction of IT in committee rooms and to gather their thoughts on the most appropriate way to move forward. Around 48% of committee members replied to the survey and of those, 69% indicated that they would accept an electronic pack instead of a paper pack.

An experimental electronic committee pack has been developed and will shortly be trialled by staff before sharing with members. We hope the pack will allow members to be able to annotate and highlight text just as they do with a paper pack. Book marking will be used to replicate the tabbing used in paper packs.

Wireless connections will be required to access the electronic committee pack in committee rooms. The Assembly Wi-Fi will need to be assessed to ensure that it is capable of being used for this type of intensive committee business. There is a strong possibility that it will need to be up graded but the cost of this has not yet been calculated.

Plans are being made for a committee pilot, in early 2012, of various devices which could be used to access electronic committee packs. The pilot will involve different types of tablets, including I pads. Laptops may also be trialled. One of the main aims of the pilot will be to assess which device works best for members in committee meetings across a range of criteria such as readability, navigation, speed of accessing, printing, annotating and highlighting etc.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 23 December 2011

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

OFMDFM: Ministerial Drivers

Mr Hussey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) when their Ministerial Drivers first took up employment as drivers for Executive Ministers; (ii) the total amount of expenses and other related payments claimed by their drivers since May 2011; and (iii) whether their drivers were civil service appointments or political party appointments.
(AQW 2408/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): Drivers for the First Minister and deputy First Minister are not employed by OFMDFM and the information which you request is therefore not held by our Department.

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the total cost of (i) the consultation process on the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration; (ii) the independent facilitators of the public and sectoral events that formed part of the public consultation on the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration; and (iii) the Consultation Analysis Report by Wallace Consulting.
(AQW 3677/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The consultation on the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration attracted 288 written responses and included the wealth of views and material gathered from 11 public meetings and 15 targeted sectoral meetings in addition to information collected through an omnibus survey. The consultation responses are now available on the OFMDFM website along with the independent analysis report and the departmental response to the issues raised.

(http://www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/index/equality/community-relations/csi-consultation.htm)

The total cost of the consultation process on the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration was £93,185.70. The table below provides a breakdown of costs associated with the delivery of the consultation exercise.

Costs for Delivery of CSI Consultation Exercise – 2010

	Total Costs £
Independent Facilitators	22,945.40
Independent Analysis	18,052.50
Public Survey	13,460.00
Design Costs	2,508.37
Printing	14,913.96
Postage	1,181.18
Newspaper Costs	7,963.37
Public Meetings	4,536.23
Sectoral Meetings	6,669.58
Translation Costs	955.11
Total	**93,185.70**

OFMDFM: Staff Salaries

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the total amount of the salaries paid to departmental staff in OFMDFM in the last 12 months.
(AQW 3998/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister incurred a cost of £16,089,519 for the year ended 30 September 2011 in respect of salaries and related salary costs. Related salary costs include employer's National Insurance contributions and employer's pension contributions.

Hospitality: Spend

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the persons or bodies to whom their Department has provided hospitality; and (ii) the cost of providing this hospitality in each of the last 12 months.
(AQW 3999/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister provides hospitality within the Department and also to persons and bodies external to the Department when attending meetings, events or training provided by the Department.

The following table sets out the costs incurred by the Department in respect of hospitality during the twelve months ended 30 September 2011.

Month	Cost (£)
October 2010	12,606
November 2010	15,919
December 2010	5,300
January 2011	3,467
February 2011	9,510
March 2011	10,237
April 2011	12,316
May 2011	12,646
June 2011	14,862
July 2011	6,035
August 2011	10,789
September 2011	16,412
Total	**130,099**

A breakdown is not held centrally on the financial accounting system of whom hospitality has been provided for.

Act of Settlement (1700)

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) their position on the proposed changes to the Act of Settlement (1700); and (ii) what contact they have had with Her Majesty's Government in relation to this issue.
(AQW 4632/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: This is not a Devolved Matter.

Capital Small Grants Schemes

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what capital small grants schemes are available from their Department, or its arm's-length bodies, for a group to create a garden, at a residential home, for the benefit of people with disabilities.
(AQW 4828/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The question relates to a very specific issue which falls outside OFMDFM's responsibility and we do not currently have a small capital grants scheme to offer.

You may be interested to learn however that OFMDFM has provided support to Groundwork NI, an organisation which delivers practical community-led regeneration projects, in deprived areas, by working in partnership with local communities, key funding

bodies, statutory authorities and other agencies. The organisation's work is guided by its purpose of "Changing Places, Changing Lives, Changing Minds."

Groundwork NI has received funding under Peace III, Theme 1.1 Regional, for a project entitled 'Reconciling Communities through Regeneration'. The OFMDFM contribution to this project is some £247k (based on a 25% OFMDFM matching contribution of the overall cost of £988,307.00). The project commenced on 1st September 2008 and is due to finish on 31st December 2011.

UK City of Culture 2013

Mr Campbell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps are being taken to ensure that events that are being organised under the auspices of the UK City of Culture 2013 in the Londonderry area are broadly based and inclusive.
(AQW 4865/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Responsibility for the programme of events rests with the Culture Company 2013. We are informed that the Culture Company 2013 has made wide and significant efforts to engage the entire community in the project, including community, business and political engagement.

Single Equality Bill

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) recommendations to the UK that it (i) take immediate action to ensure a single equality law and Bill of Rights are adopted in Northern Ireland or that the Equality Act 2010 is extended to Northern Ireland; (ii) examine whether the legislative and policy framework for dealing with the situation in Northern Ireland could not benefit by being underpinned by the standards, duties and actions prescribed by the ICERD and the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action on inter-sectionality between ethnic origin, religion, and other forms of discrimination; and (iii) inform the Committee in its next report of the results of its examination of the advisability of adopting such an approach towards the fight against sectarianism and racism, while also reporting directly on measures to address racial discrimination experienced by vulnerable ethnic minority groups in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 5101/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:

(i) We are currently considering the options for legislative reform and no decision has been taken on a single Equality Bill. We continue to keep the broad spectrum of equality legislation under review and are committed to the principle of equality for all people. Our officials continue to assess and keep us informed of developments elsewhere in relation to proposals for equality legislation.

We need to ensure that residents here enjoy the same protections as others across the European Union and beyond. We will, therefore, consider fully the comments made by the Committee in deciding the future shape of equality legislation here.

The NIO has been considering proposals from the NI Human Rights Commission on a Bill of Rights as this is not a devolved matter. The UK Government published consultation responses on a Bill of Rights in December 2010. There is currently no political consensus here on the nature of any possible Bill of Rights.

As part of a separate process, Kenneth Clarke, the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, has set up a commission to investigate the creation of a UK Bill of Rights. We will examine any proposals that would affect the rights of people here and we will be nominating representatives to the advisory group to the Commission.

(ii) We do not dispute that sectarianism and racism are directly related and our representative made this clear to the UN Committee at its hearing on the UK. It is important to state that we cannot hope to tackle racism without tackling sectarianism, and vice versa. Both racism and sectarianism have their origins in unacceptable attitudes, and find their outlets in unacceptable behaviours.

We have, of course, very robust and well-developed legislation and policy to address sectarianism, racism and other forms of discrimination and we will be very happy to report on these measures to the Committee at the next reporting round.

However, we are clear that there is still a need to distinguish and single out the issues that relate specifically to the conflict that took place and to address its specific manifestations.

We believe that this is a more effective way of addressing the problems than by conflating all issues relating to race and religion, where we might miss the causes, effects and solutions required by the particular circumstances in which the sectarianism or racism takes place.

(iii) We will be very happy to report back to the CERD Committee on the results of the examination mentioned under paragraph (ii) at the next reporting round.

Child Poverty

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what was the outcome of the pledge, in the last Programme for Government, to halve child poverty by 2010.
(AQW 5117/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A Monitoring Framework for Lifetime Opportunities, the broad architecture and principles of which the previous Executive adopted as its anti poverty and social inclusion strategy, was published on the 14th October 2010.

Detailed within the Monitoring Framework was an assessment of progress against the Programme for Government commitment to reduce child poverty by half by 2010/11.

We monitor child poverty using three methods – relative, absolute and mixed. The assessment contained within the Monitoring Framework was that, whilst child relative income poverty rates had fallen in comparison to the 1998/99 baseline, on the basis of current trends, it is unlikely that the rate of child relative income poverty would be halved by 2010/11. It should be noted that relative poverty here is measured against the UK median income. However, absolute child poverty decreased from a baseline of 29% in 1998/99 to 12% in 2006/07. Due to the global recession and other associated factors, this has subsequently risen again, although not to the 1998/99 level. The most up to date levels of child poverty have recently been published by DSD.

Regarding the development of the Child Poverty Strategy Action Plan, we refer you to the response issued to AQW 4782/11-15.

The Child Poverty Act 2010 requires us to lay annual reports before the Assembly. We will publish our first Annual Report in March 2012, and this will set out the progress we have made towards eradicating child poverty by 2020.

European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what activities their Department is planning for the 2012 European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations, and to outline what this year could achieve for Northern Ireland.
(AQW 5158/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Next year, 2012 has been designated as the European Year (EY) of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations by the European Commission. The main objectives of EY 2012 are to give tomorrow's older adults the opportunity to:

- stay in the workforce and share their experience;
- keep playing an active role in society; and
- live as healthy and fulfilling lives as possible.

The European Year is also key to maintaining solidarity between generations particularly in societies with rapidly increasing numbers of older people.

The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister will work with colleagues in other departments, the new Commissioner for Older People, the Commissioner for Children and Young People and partners in the voluntary and community sector, to develop a programme of events aimed at promoting the objectives of EY 2012 in a range of areas including employment, health care, social services, adult learning, volunteering, housing and transport.

When developed, the programme of events will also include intergenerational projects and will build on earlier work, such as the Intergenerational Showcase Event which was organised by the Older People's Advocate and the Children's Commissioner.

The Showcase Event highlighted the positive impacts on communities of younger and older people working together to share experiences, skills and knowledge. The projects showcased included local community involvement in making neighbourhoods safer and cleaner, training primary school children as facilitators to offer computer training to older people and a sharing experience project between the Kinghan Church and children from the school for children with visual and auditory impairment at Jordanstown.

The European Year will benefit older people by

- promoting independent living by providing suitable housing and accessible transport; and
- promoting healthy ageing

OFMDFM: Information Service

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the current (i) number; and (ii) annual cost of staff employed in their Department's Information Service.
(AQW 5288/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Department's Information Service provides a range of communication services within OFMDFM and a planning, co-ordination and corporate support role across all NI Executive departments. There are three business areas within the Department's information service, the details of which are laid out below.

OFMDFM Ministerial Press Office and Corporate Support

Within the press office there are currently four staff working directly to the four OFMDFM Ministers.

There are four staff who work on publications, the web and social media.

The Director and Deputy Director, supported by a Personal Secretary provide a strategic communications role across the twelve NI Executive departments.

There are six staff who work in a corporate support role providing a range of services which include the central management of cross department contracts and the management of a professional development programme for EIS staff.

The total cost for these staff in 2010/11 was £788,217.

Government Advertising Unit

There are currently fourteen staff employed in the Government Advertising Unit. The unit is a shared service centre, funded and governed by the twelve NI Executive departments and the full cost is not directly borne by OFMDFM. It was established to apply specialist expertise to the management of government advertising to improve value for money and effectiveness in communicating with the public. The unit delivered estimated savings of more than £1 million gross to the public sector during 2010/11.

NI Direct

There are currently seven staff employed in the Central Editorial Team of NIDirect. The team is responsible for the development and maintenance of the NIDirect website. All citizen information from the NI Executive departments' websites is now maintained by NIDirect. The team is not directly funded by OFMDFM but is funded through DFP's NI Direct programme. The site went live in April 2009 and to date has delivered 7.7 million visits and 23 million page impressions.

Victims and Survivors Groups: Funding Arrangements

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given that the Community Relations Council contracts with victims groups are due to expire on 31 March 2012, when the groups can expect information on the funding arrangements which will apply thereafter.
(AQW 5349/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: It is intended that an announcement regarding the funding of the Victims and Survivors groups for the 2012-13 financial year will be made in the very near future once the necessary approvals have been confirmed. It is also intended that the application process and assessment will be completed in time to ensure funding from 1 April 2012 and that there is no gap in provision to groups whose applications are successful.

Programme for Government 2008-2011: Delivery Report

Mr McCallister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they expect the Executive to sign off the final Delivery Report for the 2008-2011 Programme for Government.
(AQW 5964/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Executive noted and agreed the end year Delivery Report for the Programme for Government 2008-11 on 8 December 2011. We intend to make a Written Ministerial Statement on this matter shortly, following which a copy of the report will be placed in the Assembly Library.

Community Relations Council

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 4175/11-15, to reconcile the answer provided with the response to AQW 4233/11-15.
(AQW 5977/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Both answers are accurate. There is no disparity to reconcile.

Programme for Government

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans they have to measure well-being, given the aim stated in the draft Programme for Government to improve well-being, and in light of the Office for National Statistics report measuring well-being in Great Britain.
(AQW 6064/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: It is intended that the new Programme for Government will be supported by strategic indicators which will measure progress against priorities. It is further intended to make use of existing research on well-being and to supplement this with work being developed on subjective well-being.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she intends to ban hydraulic fracturing from taking place on all Government owned forestry land.
(AQW 5383/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): I am aware of the concerns raised about the issue of hydraulic fracturing. While I have strong reservations about this process my Department has no role in regulating the process of gas exploration or extraction other than as a statutory consultee and we will consider any request to access forestry land according to the implications of access for the delivery of forest policy and concerns about the process of hydraulic fracturing.

Sentinel Cod Fishery

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress has been made by her Department and the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute in developing a sentinel cod fishery in the Irish Sea for 2012; what further consultation she is planning with the industry on this matter; and when she expects that her Department will be in a position to submit a firm proposal to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the European Commission on this issue.
(AQW 5401/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Irish Sea cod will be subject to ICES benchmark assessments in February 2012. An important aspect of this process is the evaluation of data sources that are currently not included in the assessment, such as recent discard data, the Irish Sea egg production surveys and the UK Fisheries Science Partnership (FSP) surveys.

AFBI and DEFRA's scientific advisors CEFAS (Centre for Environment, Fisheries & Aquaculture Science) agree that the already poor data situation will deteriorate further and they intend to use the ICES benchmark process to highlight the problems and suggest a way forward.

The approach could include suggestions of further work to quantify possible sources of mortality, but also an evaluation of all available sources of information to identify the most informative for the monitoring and management of the stock. The north of Ireland industry drafted some proposals for a sentinel fishery and highlighted renewed concerns about the difference in opinion on cod abundance and stock status between the industry and the scientific assessment.

Any proposal for a sentinel fishery needs to have very clear scientific objectives that will determine the overall scope of the fishery. The exact format and extent of a sentinel or "scientific" fishery is very difficult to assess prior to the completion of the ICES benchmark process. My Department will keep fishing industry representatives informed about any developments.

Fishing Vessel Decommissioning Scheme

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when she will make an announcement about a fishing vessel decommissioning scheme.
(AQW 5402/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has completed a Business case for restructuring the fleet which has been examined by DARD economists. The next step is to submit this to DFP for approval. I will be in a position to make an announcement when DFP views are known.

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department would support hydraulic fracturing taking place on forestry land.
(AQW 5435/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am aware of the concerns raised about the issue of hydraulic fracturing. While I have strong reservations about this process my Department has no role in regulating the process of gas exploration or extraction other than as a statutory consultee and we will consider any request to access forestry land according to the implications of access for the delivery of forest policy and concerns about the process of hydraulic fracturing

In-shore Fisheries

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her Department's plans to develop the management of in-shore fisheries, particularly relating to brown crab; and to provide a timetable for when the industry can expect management of these fisheries to be progressed.
(AQW 5458/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: We have commissioned the Agri-food and Biosciences Institute to develop a draft Inshore Fisheries Strategy for consultation by March 2012. A draft strategy will be presented to the project steering group in January 2012 and this will include consideration of the outputs from the brown crab project. It is likely to be autumn 2012 before results from consultation are considered and decisions taken on management priorities. Regular updates from the project including minutes of the steering group meetings can be viewed on a dedicated section of the AFBI website.

Single Farm Payments

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why Single Farm Payments cannot be paid in installments throughout the year instead of in one lump payment, as is the case in other European Union member states; and whether she would consider allowing part payment if only a small issue was holding up an application for a Single Farm payment.
(AQW 5467/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Under current Commission Regulations for the Single Farm Payment (SFP) Scheme there are two ways in which SFP may be made in two parts rather than a single payment.

The first, allows advance payments of 50% to be made between 16 October and 30 November of the scheme year concerned, with the balance paid on or after 1 December.

The second, allows an initial payment to be made at any time during the payment window (1 December to 30 June), with the balance following later within the same period.

It is important to note that both scenarios require that all necessary controls (including all on-the-spot inspections) must be carried out before an advance or part payment can be made. It is not within the scope of the EU Regulations to allow an advance or part payment of SFP either where all controls have not been completed or in cases where a particular issue is holding up the application.

Within the north of Ireland, as with other paying agencies, the timing of the completion of all required controls has ruled out the use of the advance payment facility for SFP 2011. However, options are being explored to change this in future. This will depend on making changes to our payment and inspection processes and systems.

There would be no point in making part payments after 1 December because once all the required controls have been completed on a claim, DARD would be in a position to make the full payment in any case.

On 28 November, I announced that my Department would begin to pay out 2011 Single Farm Payments in December with the aim of paying 83% of claims in December and a total of 90% by the end of January. The December payments will be worth in the region of £200 million and will provide important support to farm incomes.

Davagh and Drumcairne Forests

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans she has to promote the facilities in Davagh and Drumcairne Forests, to mountain bikers and other users.
(AQW 5581/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am aware that Davagh and Drumcairne forests already deliver significant recreational and social benefits and that the potential exists for further development particularly through working with other recreational and tourism providers.

This is in line with my wish to see forests used more widely for safe and responsible enjoyment and the forest recreation strategy acknowledges that we will have to work with partners to realise the full potential of forests to deliver against wider objectives such as health, tourism, education and sport.

My officials in Forest Service have been working closely with Cookstown District Council in finalising proposals for an enhanced recreation product in Davagh forest which would include the development of a 19km mountain bike trails project. This project is the result of Cookstown District Council seeing the potential to promote Davagh as a key recreation and tourism attraction in the Council area.

A walking trail has also been developed at Drumcairne forest as a result of close co-operation between Cookstown District Council and a local community group 'Friends of Drumcairne'.

In promoting the further development of recreation and tourism benefits, my officials in Forest Service wish to continue their work with local authorities and other recreational providers to ensure that opportunities area realised, where they can be incorporated within broader forest management plans and objectives.

DARD: Headquarters

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what provision will be made for staff in her Department who are currently working in Belfast and are unwilling or unable to relocate when the Department moves its headquarters to a more rural location.
(AQW 5732/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As yet no decisions have been taken on where the new DARD headquarters is to be sited. However when that decision is taken, the Department will develop a strategy that will allow, where possible, the wishes of individual staff regarding work location to be taken account of.

One of the main aspects of this strategy will be transfers across the NICS that will allow current DARD staff who do not wish to relocate to be replaced by other NICS staff currently located in the Belfast area who do wish to avail of the opportunity to relocate. This strategy will be informed by existing NICS policies on, for example, such factors as interdepartmental transfers, payment of excess fares and other allowances and also the contractual rights of staff in respect of mobility. The Department will ensure that this strategy also seeks to give priority to staff with specific needs such as disability or caring responsibilities. The detail of such a policy can only be determined after the new location is known.

Although the Department, working in conjunction with the wider NICS, will endeavour to ensure that as many staff as possible are in their preferred location post relocation, the strategy must also be mindful of factors such as business continuity and for that reason it may not be possible to meet the needs of every individual. The Department will, however, continue to consult and communicate with staff and their trade unions to ensure that every possible avenue is explored to ensure that as many staff as possible are working in their preferred location in the future.

Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she can confirm her Department's commitment to the Agri-Food and Bio-sciences Institute operation in Loughgall; and if she will detail the long term plans for the facility.
(AQW 5764/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: AFBI exists primarily to provide DARD with statutory, analytical and diagnostic scientific services, scientific research and advice and a scientific emergency response capability. It also serves the agri-food industry and wider community in a local, national and international context by delivering high quality scientific services.

AFBI is located in seven specialised, DARD-owned sites across the north of Ireland. My Department is currently developing a strategic outline business case (SOC) looking at the long term investment requirements for the AFBI occupied estate. This will aim to set out a high level roadmap towards an AFBI occupied estate that is right-sized and fit for purpose, enabling AFBI to meet its business objectives in an efficient and effective manner. A re-developed estate will secure AFBI's capacity to deliver DARD'S scientific requirements and be in keeping with the overall strategic direction of AFBI. The future of the Loughgall site will be considered within the overall context of this SOC.

Hydraulic Fracturing: Shale Gas

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the actions that her Department would take before allowing a company to extract shale gas from forestry land.
(AQW 5768/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am aware of the concerns raised about the issue of hydraulic fracturing. While I have strong reservations about this process my Department has no role in regulating the process of gas exploration or extraction other than as a statutory consultee and we will consider any request to access forestry land according to the implications of access for the delivery of forest policy and concerns about the process of hydraulic fracturing.

Prior to allowing a company to extract shale gas from forestry land, my Department would seek confirmation that all statutory and regulatory permissions had been granted from the appropriate authorities.

Hydraulic Fracturing: Shale Gas

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether the extraction of shale gas from forestry land would require Ministerial approval.
(AQW 5769/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am aware of the concerns raised about the issue of hydraulic fracturing. While I have strong reservations about this process my Department has no role in regulating the process of gas exploration or extraction other than as a statutory consultee. Forest Service will consider any request to access forestry land according to the implications of access for the delivery of forest policy and concerns about the process of hydraulic fracturing. I have asked my officials in Forest Service to keep me briefed on developments.

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how a ban by her Department on hydraulic fracturing on forestry land could be introduced.
(AQW 5770/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am aware of the concerns raised about the issue of hydraulic fracturing. While I have strong reservations about this process my Department has no role in regulating the process of gas exploration or extraction other than as a statutory consultee.

At this stage I am both personally and politically concerned about the process of hydraulic fracturing and its potential impact on environment on the island of Ireland.

Gorse Fires

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department is working with the PSNI and the Department of Justice to ensure that individuals responsible for, or involved with, the starting of illegal gorse fires are being pursued.
(AQW 5818/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Gorse fires that caused damage to my Department's forests have been reported to the PSNI. The PSNI and Department of Justice are responsible for taking forward any investigation and my officials in Forest Service will assist with any enquiries.

Any investigation into the causes of gorse fires on private land is a matter for the landowner, NI Fire and Rescue Service and PSNI.

Assisted Rural Transport Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is the total cost of the Assisted Rural Transport Scheme in each of the last three years, broken down by constituency or council area.
(AQW 5850/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: DARD, in conjunction with the Department of Regional Development (DRD), introduced the pilot Assisted Rural Travel Scheme (ARTS) on the 01 December 2009. DRD contribute to the scheme by paying for the administrative and operational costs associated with ARTS and their Dial-A-Lift scheme. DARD funding covers the total cost of the ARTS subsidised fares and the area based information available is set out in the table below:

DARD funding for Assisted Rural Travel Scheme 09/10 and 10/11

Rural Community Transport Partnership	Council Catchment Areas	Dec 2009 To March 2010	April 2010 To March 2011
ART	Armagh City and District Council Area;	£2,377.00	£15,913.00
DART	Banbridge District Council Area; Craigavon Borough Council Area;	£1,321.50	£10,385.50
NMCT	Newry and Mourne District Council Area;	£905.00	£15,407.09
CRCT	Cookstown District Council Area;	£3,269.50	£17,615.50
DDCT	Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council Area;	£1,609.00	£17,276.00
OACT	Magherafelt District Council Area;	£3,899.45	£17,295.00
DDAT	Down District Council Area; Ards Borough Council Area; North Down Borough Council Area;	£7,449.20	£38,499.85
EASILINK	Strabane District Council Area; Derry City Council Area	£6,369.30	£35,029.95
	Omagh District Council Area;	£3,645.30	£15,623.70
NCCT	Limavady Borough Council Area	£3,021.83	£18,930.34
	Coleraine Borough Council Area; Ballymoney Borough Council Area;	£625.00	£6,869.00
	Moyle District Council Area; Ballymena Borough Council Area;	£1,279.00	£15,137.75
FAST	Fermanagh District Council Area;	£3,008.50	£20,802.00
RURAL LIFT	Fermanagh District Council Area	£5,510.75	£25,536.20
LVRT	Lisburn District Council Area; Castlereagh District Council Area;	£672.80	£10,449.80
SACT	Larne City Council Area: Carrickfergus Borough Council Area; Antrim Borough Council Area; Newtownabbey Borough Council Area	£2,876.50	£17,487.75
Totals		**£47,839.63**	**£298,258.43**

Flood Damage

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail all the payments made in (i) 2007; (ii) 2008; (iii) 2009; (iv) 2010; and (v) 2011 to date, in relation to flood damage.
(AQW 5927/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Payments were made in relation to flood damage as follows:

(i) 2007 - Nil;

(ii) 2008 - Nil;

(iii) 2009 - £500,000 for 'flooding hardship in agriculture';

(iv) 2010 - Nil; and

(v) 2011 - Nil.

Gas Exploration or Extraction

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether any drilling has taken place on forestry land for the purposes of gas exploration or extraction in the last five years; and if so, to detail the location, size, depth, number of holes, and projected long term impact on the land.
(AQW 6053/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: No drilling has taken place on forestry land for the purposes of gas exploration or extraction in the last five years.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Rural Areas: Funding for Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how she plans to ensure that rural areas receive sufficient support from her Department; and for her assessment of culture, arts and leisure provision in rural areas.
(AQW 5471/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure seeks to enable a broad and diverse range of the NI population, including the rural population, to participate in culture, arts and leisure activities.

I recently met Michael Hughes, Chief Executive Officer, Rural Community Network to discuss the aspects of DCAL's work that impact on rural communities.

Provision has been made across the Department's activities to ensure rural areas are included. For example:

- We will work to further disseminate and develop the Líofa Initiative in rural areas by organising 3 localised Líofa launches outside of Belfast and Derry and facilitate rural learning where local classes might be unavailable by ensuring that online Irish language courses are signposted on the DCAL website.
- The strategy for sport, "Sport Matters" includes provision for sport in rural areas and amongst rural dwellers
- DCAL maintains, develops and promotes a public angling estate across NI
- Fisheries conservation work covers all of NI and is delivered from Bushmills, Movanagher near Kilrea, Castlewellan, and Riversdale near Enniskillen
- Libraries NI has a statutory duty to provide a comprehensive library service, including rural areas. This is currently discharged through the provision of 34 branches in small rural settlements (of less than 4,500 people), around 30 mobile libraries and an on-line library service on librariesni.org.uk .
- Departmental Officials and the Arts Council recently met the Rural Community Network to raise awareness of funding streams, including the Creative Industries Innovation Fund.
- The Arts Council have regular contact with the Rural Enablers. They have addressed meetings to update them on available programmes.
- DCAL owns/leases 22 water recreation sites in rural locations which provide a variety of paths for walking, cycling and picnicking beside lakes, rivers and canals.

Moyle: Funding for Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding her Department has provided to the Moyle area in the last five years; and for her assessment of the current level of culture, arts and leisure provision in that area.
(AQW 5473/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Table 1 attached, details the funding provided by my Department in the Moyle area in the last five years.

Funding is not allocated by my Department on the basis of District Council area and I am therefore unable to make the assessment you have asked for.

TABLE 1

Project	2006/07 £	2007/08 £	2008/09 £	2009/10 £	2010/11 £
Community Festivals Fund (match funded by Moyle District Council)			4,400	4,400	4,600
Habitat works in upper River Bush (Moyle section)				2,500	2,500
Habitat works in Margy/ Glenshesk and Tow rivers		2,000			
Replacement signs and fixtures along Moyle section of River Bush			2,000		2,000

Project	2006/07 £	2007/08 £	2008/09 £	2009/10 £	2010/11 £
Habitat works on Well Water near Armoy			3,000		
Habitat works on Mosside Water and Doughery Water				2,000	
Bushmills Hatchery –associated running costs	47,000	50,000	64,000	32,000	54,000
Total	**47,000**	**52,000**	**73,400**	**40,900**	**63,100**

Loughbrickland Lake: Weed Cutting Machine

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 4543/11-15, whether she will publish the business case for the weed cutting machine, information about which was provided to the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure by departmental officials on 29 September 2011.
(AQW 5522/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I will have officials arrange to have a copy of the appropriate business case placed in the Assembly Library once the procurement process has been completed.

Salmon Nets: Inspection

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the process undertaken by departmental staff when carrying out an (i) announced inspection; and (ii) unannounced inspection of salmon nets which have been licensed by her Department.
(AQW 5523/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The process undertaken by DCAL Fisheries Protection Officers when carrying out announced and unannounced inspections of licensed salmon nets is essentially the same. An inspection may comprise one or more of the following actions:

(i) Inspection of nets for compliance with Fisheries legislation;

(ii) Inspection of catch for compliance with tagging and logbook regulations;

(iii) Monitoring of compliance with Fisheries legislation for closed weekends/seasons;

(iv) Inspection of associated premises and vehicles.

Inspections may also include covert enforcement activities to monitor compliance with Fisheries legislation.

Ulster-Scots Academy

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the Ulster-Scots Academy.
(AQW 5526/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: An Ulster-Scots Academy Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) was appointed in March 2011 for a four year period. The key role of the Ministerial Advisory Group is to consider and recommend a holistic development and research strategy for the section.

The MAG is supporting discrete projects that will support an Academy approach using an interim development plan which was approved by the Department.

The Interim development plan identified three main programme strands Education; History, Heritage and Culture; and Language and Literature.

A draft development and research plan has been produced by the MAG and is being considered.

Salmon Nets: Monitoring

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 1903/11-15, how her Department monitors the licensed nets listed to ensure that they comply with the EU Habitats Directive.
(AQW 5606/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department has commissioned scientific research that will help to inform the assessment of the impact of these DCAL licensed nets on salmon populations returning to rivers that may be designated as Special Areas of Conservation under the EU Habitats Directive.

Salmon Nets

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 1903/11-15, whether any of the licensed nets listed breach any EU or Northern Ireland regulations.
(AQW 5607/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department has no record of any prosecutions against the relevant licence holders under NI regulations.

EU environmental legislation such as the Habitats Directive or the Water Framework Directive, is not usually used to take action against individuals, but rather requires competent authorities not to permit activities that may have a negative impact on the environment.

Salmon Nets

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 1903/11-15, when her Department last approached the holders of the licensed nets listed to explore the option of buying out these licences; and what commercial value is placed upon each of these nets.
(AQW 5609/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: During a series of meetings with DCAL officials in 2008/09, the licence holders were advised that the Department was offering them the option of a buy out with similar terms to the scheme which closed in 2004.

The value of each of the nets at that time is commercial in confidence and I am unable to release this information.

Public Angling Estate: County Fermanagh

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what work has taken place to improve the public angling estate in County Fermanagh in each of the last five years; and what work is planned over the next five years.
(AQW 5645/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department has undertaken the following works and projects to improve the Public Angling Estate in Co Fermanagh in each of the last five years. Some of the works listed below are undertaken annually.

- Annual survey of approximately 90 semi-quantitative electro fishing sites to provide data trends informing salmonid management of the catchment.
- Annual acquisition of 1,000,000 selectively bred Erne trout fry and 1000,000 quasi-wild Erne salmon fry and parr.
- Annual planning, co-ordination and delivery of the effective stocking of the trout and salmon fry.
- Annual participation in the organisation and promotion of fishing competitions, which attract anglers from across Europe to Co Fermanagh.
- Annual maintenance and repairs to existing angling infrastructure.

2007

- DCAL staff designed and supervised an INTERREG funded project carried out by Erne and Melvin Enhancement Company during 2007/08, which accounted for 2 km of river enhancement on the River Dooragh and River Kesh. The Department also built a carpark and slipway at Lough MacNean.

2008

- The Department improved access by creating a 500m pathway at Lough Keenaghan and undertook a river enhancement project of 1km on Castle Archdale (Hollow) river.
- In 2008 DCAL was the implementing body for administering and overseeing EU Peace II funding of Measure 1.2a of approximately £60K to enhance Lough Melvin tributaries. DCAL also supervised INTERREG funding carried out by Erne and Melvin Enhancement Company during 2007/08 which accounted for 2 km of river enhancement to River Dooragh and River Kesh.

2009

- The Department improved access by building a 700m pathway at Cathcart's Shore

2010

- The Department improved access by building a pathway and carpark at Mill Lough. Three disabled angling stands were constructed at Broad Meadow. The Department undertook 50 % of 1.5km of Tempo River enhancement project.
- The Department carried out an investigation into lacustrine stocking of Erne trout to suitable Lough shore habitat.

2011

- Improvement works included two angling stands at Mill Lough, one disabled stand with access path and an angling stand built at Boa Island bridges. The Department also carried out a river enhancement project on 1.5 km of the Ballinamallard River.
- DCAL also commenced a salmonid index in the Garvary River and construction of a fish counter weir.

Works planned for the next five years include completing and maintaining the works outlined above and where possible to develop and increase fish stocks. The Department proposes to source sections of Erne tributaries for enhancement.

The Department is currently considering incorporating into the Public Angling Estate the six still water coarse fisheries in Fermanagh previously funded by Peace II and maintained by Fermanagh District Council.

The delivery of future activities will be determined by available budgets and Departmental priorities.

Emigration

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail any survey that has taken place to identify the impact that increasing emigration, particularly by young people, is having on (i) clubanna GAA; (ii) rugby clubs; and (iii) soccer clubs.
(AQW 5653/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Neither my Department nor Sport NI is aware of any survey that has taken place to identify the impact that increasing emigration, particularly by young people, is having on clubanna GAA, rugby clubs or soccer clubs. Responsibility for undertaking such a survey would rest, in the first instance, with the governing bodies of those sports. However, under the sports strategy, Sport Matters, DCAL has established a target for sport – including GAA, rugby and soccer – to increase by 2014 the number of people in the north in membership of at least one sports club. The Department has also recently approved an action plan to deliver this target which is being implemented with support and assistance from the GAA and the governing bodies of rugby and soccer in the north.

Fish Stocks

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail any work that has been carried out in the last ten years to quantify fish stock levels in (i) Lough Melvin; (ii) Lough MacNean; (iii) Lough Erne and its satellite lakes.
(AQW 5655/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is responsible for fish monitoring under the Water Framework Directive and with Inland Fisheries Ireland in cross border catchments.

The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) with DCAL assistance undertake various surveys to evaluate the sustainability of fish stock as part of North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO) survey work.

(i) Inland Fisheries Ireland has carried out surveys at Lough Melvin in 2002, 2005, 2008 and 2011. All data in relation to these surveys are retained by Inland Fisheries Ireland.

(ii) Upper and Lower Lough Macnean were surveyed in 2002, 2006 and 2010. Eels were last surveyed in Lough Macnean under the Erne Eel Enhancement Programme 1998-2000.

(iii) A multi-mesh netting survey to a standard design is carried out on Lower Lough Erne every three years with surveys having taken place in 2002. 2004, 2007 and 2010. The next survey is due in the summer of 2013. A separate acoustically targeted survey is carried each survey year (time and weather permitting) to confirm the continued presence of the relic population of pollan in Lower Lough Erne. Inland Fisheries Ireland undertook a fyke net survey in 2010 in Upper Lough Erne for eels.

Inland Waterways

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure on how many loughs, lakes or inland waterways, which are licensed for fishing, are boats (i) permitted for; and (ii) prohibited from, fishing.
(AQW 5657/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department is responsible for 63 game and coarse fisheries which form the Public Angling Estate. Details of which Public Angling Estate waters permit fishing from boats and those that prohibit fishing from boats can be found on the DCAL Angling Website www.nidirect.gov.uk/angling.

Restrictions on which Public Angling Estate waters permit or prohibit fishing from boats are defined in Regulation 8 of the Public Angling Estate Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

- 14 Public Angling Estate waters permit fishing from boats.
- 6 Public Angling Estate waters permit fishing from boats supplied by the Department.
- All other Public Angling Estate waters prohibit fishing from boats

My Department is not responsible for private fisheries and the owners of such fisheries are free to make their own decisions regarding allowing or prohibiting the use boats for fishing on their waters.

Inland Waterways

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure on how many loughs, lakes or inland waterways, which are licensed for fishing, have boats been prohibited from fishing in each of the last five years.
(AQW 5659/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department has prohibited fishing from boats in one Public Angling Estate water in the last five years.

Inland Waterways

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the rationale behind the decision to prohibit fishermen using boats on many inland waterways, given that the use of boats is permitted in many neighbouring jurisdictions.
(AQW 5662/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Restrictions on which Public Angling Estate waters permit or prohibit fishing from boats are defined in Regulation 8 of the Public Angling Estate Byelaws (Northern Ireland) 2005.

A number of Public Angling Estate waters are reservoirs owned by NI Water and the majority of those reservoirs are used for the public water supply. NI Water does not permit angling from boats due to strict European Legislation on water quality, with possible fines and infractions being taken out against the British government should pollution be caused by boats.

There are also issues regarding boats being transported between waters transferring invasive species such as zebra mussels. This can only be prevented by anglers thoroughly cleaning their boats after each use. The Department does not have the resources to ensure this preventative activity is carried out at the Public Angling Estate waters in question.

Rugby World Cup: 2023

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment that the impact of Ireland potentially hosting the Rugby World Cup in 2023 would have on the number of people playing rugby.
(AQW 5711/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for assessing the impact that Ireland potentially hosting the Rugby World Cup in 2023 might have on the number of people playing rubgy, rests, in the first instance, with the governing body of the sport, the Irish Rugby Football Union. However, under my sports strategy, Sport Matters, Government is committed to establishing the north of Ireland as a world class venue for sporting events. Securing a Rugby World Cup in Ireland, with games being staged in the north, would mark a significant demonstration of that commitment.

Fishing: Inspections

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 1903/11-15, (i) what action her staff take in relation to witness tagging; (ii) how often they verify the number of fish in the catch; (iii) at what point is each catch monitored; (iv) at what point is each catch verified; (v) what mode of transport is used to inspect the nets; and (vi) how often her staff have used the net operator's boat to inspect the nets.
(AQW 5735/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

(i) Inspections and boat and shore patrols are carried out by DCAL Fisheries Protection Officers (FPO) on the coast to ensure compliance with the Fisheries (Tagging and Logbook) Byelaws (Northern Ireland) 2001 and other Fisheries legislation by salmon net licence holders. Where breaches of legislation are detected enforcement action will be taken against those in breach of the legislation.

(ii) In 2011 DCAL FPO's carried out 11 inspections at the point of capture and 5 licence holder cold store inspections.

(iii) Catches may be monitored at the point of capture and at licence holders premises such as their cold store.

(iv) Each catch is not individually verified. Catch figures, broken down by time and date, are determined by annual returns submitted by licence holders to the Department.

(v) A combination of boat and shore patrols are used to inspect the nets.

(vi) A net operator's boat was used on two occasions in 2011.

Fishing: Illegal or Unlicensed Nets

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) how often her Department has patrolled coastal waters to investigate the use of illegal or unlicensed nets in the last three years; (ii) in how many instances were illegal or unlicensed nets found; and (iii) what action was taken against people found to be using illegal or unlicensed nets.
(AQW 5736/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Data is available from 1 June 2009 when the Fisheries Conservancy Board was abolished and DCAL assumed responsibility for the enforcement of fisheries legislation. Data for 2011 is only for the first quarter as subsequent information has yet to be fully verified.

(i) The following patrols of coastal waters were carried out by DCAL Fisheries Protection Officers:

- 1 June 2009 - 31 March 2010
- 108 Coastal shore patrols and 2 boat patrols
- 1 April 2010 - 31 March 2011
- 134 Coastal shore patrols and 50 boat patrols
- 1 April 2011 - 30 June 2011
- 25 Coastal shore patrols and 8 boat patrols

(ii) How many instances were illegal or unlicensed nets found:

- 1 June 09 - 31 March 2010 - 2
- 1 April 2010 - 31 March 2011 - 5
- 1 April 2011 - 30 June 2011 - 0

(iii) Action taken against people found using illegal or unlicensed nets:

- 1 June 2009 - 31 March 2010
- 1 net -warning letter issued to 2 persons / 1 net unattended forfeiture order completed to dispose of net.
- 1 April 2010 - 31 March 2011
- 1 net - 1 warning letter issued / 4 nets unattended forfeiture order completed to dispose of nets.

Fish Counters

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) how many fish counters are currently operational; (ii) how often these counters are maintained; (iii) for her assessment of their operational efficiency and fitness for purpose; (iv) whether an independent assessment of their operational efficiency has been commissioned; and (v) whether any of these counters have been out of operation for a period of more than two weeks in the last three years.
(AQW 5737/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

(i) There are five fish counters and counting facilities currently operational on the River Bush, River Maine, Lower Bann, River Dun and Shimna River.

(ii) Operational counters are visited once a week to download data and carry out maintenance during the period when wild Atlantic salmon are migrating upstream.

(iii) I consider that the fish counting methodology employed is operationally effective and the fish counters are fit for purpose.

(iv) The operation and maintenance of the counters is carried out by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), which is independent of DCAL.

(v) The Lower Bann counter is the only one of these counters which has been out of operation for a period of more than two weeks in the last three years.

Salmon and Inland Fisheries Forum

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the appointment process, within each sector represented on the Forum, for membership of the Salmon and Inland Fisheries Forum; and to detail the role that she, or her predecessor, had in making appointments to the Forum.
(AQW 5739/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Consultation on the proposed make-up, role and administration of the new Stakeholder Forum issued on the 20th December 2007 and closed on the 11th April 2008. An Assessment Panel consisting of administrative, policy and technical personnel from DCAL Inland Waterways and Inland Fisheries Branch analysed and objectively assessed the relevance, practicality and quality of the comments received.

My predecessor agreed the outcomes of the Consultation on the 29th October 2008. The CAL Committee also considered the consultation and agreed its outcomes.

Membership of the Salmon and Inland Fisheries Forum is drawn from a number of nominating bodies and recruitment by way of public advertisement for those interests where no nominating body exists.

Nominating bodies were asked to propose members for the Forum, while those responding to any publicly advertised position were interviewed by DCAL officials.

Emerging Artists

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what support her Department provides for emerging artists.
(AQW 5747/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Arts Council of Northern Ireland provides a suite of support through its Support for the Individual Artist Programme (SIAP). They aim to award 30% of SIAP grants to new and emerging artists and are on target to achieve this aim for 2011/12. Details are provided on the attached annex.

Annex

General Art Awards – Grants up to £1,500

Awards can be for specific projects, specialised research, personal artistic development and certain materials/ equipment.

Self Arranged Residencies – Grants up to £5,000

These awards enable individual artists wishing to work outside the north of Ireland to develop exchanges and take up self-arranged residencies.

Major Individual Awards – Grants of £15,000 (4 awards made in 2011/12)

A limited number of awards each year intended to create the circumstances in which established artists with national/ international recognition may develop extended or ambitious work.

Travel Awards – Level of grant fixed by destination (from £200 to £800)

These awards enable individual artists to travel from the north of Ireland to develop their skills and expertise. Applicants must provide evidence that they have been invited by a host organisation in the country to which they intend to travel.

Artists' Career Enhancement Scheme — Grants of £5,000 (13 awards made in 2011/12)

These awards aim to deepen the developmental impact of Arts Council's support for artists, with a targeted package of training, mentoring and support provided for successful applicants. These awards aim to support career artists whose practice is of high quality, original, challenging and innovative. The awards are designed to support artists in their professional development, enabling successful applicants to raise their profile and significantly enhance their career.

The British School at Rome Fellowship (one award made every other year)

This residency offers visual artists the opportunity to work in Rome for a period of 6 months between 2nd January and 27th June 2012 on a project of their choosing. Rather than experimenting on new techniques, scholars are encouraged to use their time to work on developing ideas for a new body of work or exploring themes that will advance their practice. The Fellow is encouraged to be self reliant and adaptable.

Young Musicians Platform – Biennial scheme - 3 grants of £5,000

The Arts Council, in collaboration with BBC NI, offers awards for young, exceptionally talented solo musicians/singers or ensembles who have finished their first academic, graduate level qualification and are ready to enter the professional world as artists. The financial award associated with this scheme will allow applicants to spend a sizeable amount of time learning from a master musician/ teacher/composer etc. abroad. Priority will be given to applications where the associated period of learning is taking place outside of Great Britain and Ireland. The BBC will facilitate this scheme by offering two professional broadcast performances to successful applicants.

Track and Field Athletes

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) what funding is available for track and field athletes; (ii) to outline the criteria to qualify for this funding; and (iii) how this compares to other regions in the UK and the Republic of Ireland. **(AQW 5749/11-15)**

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI is the lead development agency for sport in the north of Ireland with responsibility for the distribution of funding. Sport NI advises that it currently has no funding programmes open to applications for track and field athletes. Its Athlete Investment Programme, however, receives applications from the governing bodies of sports, including Athletics NI, in respect of their athletes. In order to qualify for funding under this programme, athletes must meet certain minimum performance standards previously agreed with Athletics NI. Further details on the qualifying criteria that apply to different categories of athlete can be found on the Sport NI website at www.sportni.net/NR/rdonlyres/ED2FA556-47A2-4527-802B-5FF408D64177/0/2012AthleticsStandards.pdf. Furthermore, athletes must also demonstrate their future potential to achieve international sporting success at Olympic, World, European or Commonwealth level. It should be noted that these standards indicate eligibility for application and do not automatically lead to investment. Sport NI advises that the availability of this funding is similar to England, Scotland, Wales and the south of Ireland.

Department of Education

Aggregated Schools Budget

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Education what discussions were held with school principals regarding the fact that the reductions in revenue expenditure for the 2012/13 financial year would be greater than originally envisaged. **(AQW 5167/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The scale of the savings required in education has been clear since the Budget 2011-15 process concluded in March this year. My Department has produced and published a detailed, transparent Savings Delivery Plan to close the gap of nearly £300m by 2014/15. The intention, throughout, has been to protect frontline services as much as possible. Due to the scale of the Aggregated Schools Budget (ASB) it was impossible to protect it totally. I have however reviewed the budget allocations and two weeks ago I mitigated the impact on the Aggregated Schools Budget by putting £40million

from my budget into it over the next three years. Otherwise the decrease next year in the ASB would have been more than 3% compared to the current year.

Normally schools get their budget information in January/February but I was keen to get as much information out to schools at the earliest possible date.

My Department issued on Friday 25 November a letter to all schools setting out in detail the future funding position they face. I am clear that, as Education Minister, I have a duty to inform schools as soon as possible of the budget planning information I have available to ensure they are fully informed when making important future decisions.

Clearly many schools will have difficult choices to make but this early notification of future budgets will allow them to make informed decisions and plan for the future.

School Places: Foyle Constituency

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of unfilled school places in the Foyle constituency broken down by (i) school; and (ii) (a) primary; and (b) post-primary, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 5335/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of unfilled school places in the Foyle constituency broken down by primary and post-primary school in each of the last five years is as detailed in the tables attached.

The number of vacant places in schools is derived from the difference between a school's approved enrolment number and the number of pupils enrolled at the school.

The figures exclude the enrolments of pupils in receipt of a statement of special educational needs and pupils admitted on appeal by the independent appeals tribunals or by direction of the independent Exceptional Circumstances Body as these are admitted over and above a school's approved enrolment number.

Unfilled Places in Primary Schools 2006/07 to 2010/11

School Name	2010/11	2009/10	2008/09	2007/08	2006/07
Ashlea Primary School	180	172	160	169	166
Ballougry Primary School	12	3	5	15	14
Broadbridge Primary School	0	0	0	0	0
Bunscoil Cholmcille	85	77	61	66	60
Chapel Road Primary School	85	86	87	118	132
Craigbrack Primary School	69	51	39	50	43
Culmore Primary School	6	5	1	1	11
Drumahoe Primary School	63	50	43	50	31
Ebrington Controlled Primary School	241	235	227	192	193
Eglinton Primary School	42	39	26	36	32
Fountain Primary School	71	73	77	77	59
Gaelscoil Eadain Mhoir	22	24	17	11	30
Gaelscoil na Daroige[1]	37	17	N/A	N/A	N/A
Glendermott Primary School	74	70	51	57	66
Good Shepherd Primary School and Nursery School	30	36	13	25	17
Greenhaw Primary School	21	16	8	27	37
Groarty Primary School	23	31	32	30	25
Hollybush Primary School	17	21	5	30	31
Holy Child Primary School	190	195	181	175	173
Holy Family Primary School	281	278	242	278	258
Lisnagelvin Primary School	87	103	45	78	56
Londonderry Model Primary School	77	69	59	69	79

School Name	2010/11	2009/10	2008/09	2007/08	2006/07
Longtower Primary School	385	374	350	341	325
Mullabuoy Primary School	132	134	134	141	141
Nazareth House Primary School	161	158	136	114	92
Newbuildings Primary School	204	187	184	162	144
Oakgrove Integrated Primary School	15	21	14	17	1
Rosemount Primary School	311	296	303	310	296
Sacred Heart Primary School	231	240	246	236	216
St Anne's Primary School	300	272	242	231	213
St Brigid's Primary School	198	186	314	298	294
St Columba's Primary School	127	120	125	119	110
St Eithne's Primary School	112	111	58	64	44
St Eugene's Primary School	105	92	95	83	273
St John's Primary School	193	186	148	150	156
St Oliver Plunkett Primary School	120	119	116	115	108
St Patricks Primary School	116	121	103	81	60
St Paul's Primary School Slievemore	395	386	377	380	375
St Therese Primary School	120	120	95	92	70
Steelstown Voluntary Maintained Primary School	288	267	237	217	181
Total	**5226**	**5041**	**4656**	**4705**	**4612**

Source: NI School Census and School Access Team Data Unfilled Places in Post Primary Schools 2006/07 to 2010/11

1. This school opened in September 2009.

School Name	2010/11	2009/10	2008/09	2007/08	2006/07
Foyle & Londonderry College	42	97	113	108	108
Immaculate Conception College	359	343	326	335	335
Lisneal College	132	107	87	56	86
Lumen Christi College	1	1	2	0	0
Oakgrove Integrated College	10	8	4	8	5
St Brigid's College	77	151	115	155	112
St Cecilia's College	0	0	0	0	0
St Columb's College	21	31	49	76	58
St Joseph's Boys' School	22	34	36	30	17
St Mary's College	0	5	0	18	3
St Peter's High School	415	389	349	320	269
Thornhill College	18	17	18	13	6
Total	**1097**	**1183**	**1099**	**1119**	**999**

Source: NI School Census and School Access Team Data

Road Accidents: School Buses

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of road accidents in each of the last five years involving (i) parked Education and Library Board school buses; and (ii) parked Translink school buses.
(AQW 5477/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have been informed by the Education and Library Boards that the number of road accidents involving parked Board and Translink school buses for the last five years is as follows:

Year	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	WELB	Translink
2006/07	0	0	0	0	1	0
2007/08	1	0	0	0	0	1
2008/09	0	0	0	1	2	2
2009/10	1	0	0	0	2	1
2010/11	3	0	0	1	1	1
Total	**5**	**0**	**0**	**2**	**6**	**5**

Maghera High School

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education for an update on the disposal of the former Maghera High School site.
(AQW 5550/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Expressions of interest in the former Maghera High School were received from

Magherafelt Council (subsequently withdrawn 5 May 2010), the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta. The Maghera High School site will not be disposed of until all options for future education use have been fully explored.

Maghera High School

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education for an update on all the expressions of interest from educational bodies in relation to the former Maghera High School site.
(AQW 5551/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Expressions of interest in the former Maghera High School were received from Magherafelt Council (subsequently withdrawn 5 May 2010), the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta.

Youth Service: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many hours of Youth Service, per week, are currently provided in the North Down area.
(AQW 5565/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Youth provision in the North Down area is a matter for the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB). The SEELB has advised that there are 93 youth units registered with the Board in the North Down area providing services for approximately 544 hours per average week.

There may be other youth service provision operating in the area which is not registered with the Education and Library Board.

Post-primary Schools: Work Experience Provision

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the current work experience provision for students in post-primary schools; and whether the current level of provision is sufficient to allow students to make an informed choice about their career-path.
(AQW 5582/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I warmly welcome the support employers give to schools and pupils by offering work-related learning opportunities whether through work experience, work shadowing, work-based assignments, industrial visits, mock interviews, industry days, ambassador programmes and enterprise activities. Good links between schools, employers and the community are important for all aspects of the curriculum including careers education, information and guidance provision.

Over 100,000 school age learners each year are now participating in employability and work-related learning programmes which aim to promote creativity and innovation; introduce young people to the world of business and entrepreneurship; and provide opportunities to stimulate new ideas and thinking. Apart from work experience placements these include careers conventions, competitions, exhibitions and celebrations of excellence and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) specific programmes.

My Department has provided additional funding specifically for the delivery of business education activities, including work experience opportunities to enable pupils to gain an insight into the world of work. Particularly at Key Stage 4 it is important for pupils to keep career options open.

Funding is provided to School Employer Connections and Charter Work Experience to facilitate delivery of work experience opportunities for post-primary pupils.

In the 2010/11 financial year, School Employer Connections and Charter Work Experience facilitated over 8,000 work experience opportunities. These opportunities can take the form of work experience placements, class study visits, work inspiration programmes and work open days.

Bangor Central Integrated Primary School

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Education whether he plans to allocate funding for a new build for Bangor Central Integrated Primary School.
(AQW 5623/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As I set out in my Statement to the Assembly on Monday 26 September 2011, I have commissioned the five Education and Library Boards, working with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and other sectors, to co-ordinate a strategic area planning process to shape the future pattern of education delivery.

Schools previously identified as needing a new build will be critically assessed alongside all other potential projects as part of the area planning process to determine how they will contribute to the overall infrastructure needed. I recognise that this school, along with others, is facing challenges in terms of accommodation. However until the area planning work is completed, I will not be in a position to comment on a possible new build for any school.

Maghera High School

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Education whether any expressions of interest have been received in relation to the former Maghera High School site.
(AQW 5624/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Expressions of interest in the former Maghera High School were received from Magherafelt Council (subsequently withdrawn 5 May 2010), the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta.

Small Businesses: Payment of Invoices

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the target time for the payment of invoices to small businesses by each Education and Library Board; (ii) whether he is aware of any delays in meeting these targets; and (iii) what action has been taken to ensure that delays do not occur.
(AQW 5641/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Each Education and Library Board (ELB) is required to agree an annual Resource Allocation Plan (RAP) with the Department of Education. The Plan includes prompt payment targets that each Board is expected to achieve. The 2011-12 RAP target across all ELBS is to ensure by 31 March 2012 that 85% of all non-disputed invoices are paid within 30 days and 50% are paid within 10 working days.

As Minister for Education I am aware of delays in the ELBs meeting these targets. The following actions have been taken to improve performance in this area:

- Guidance has been issued to all of the Department's Arms Length Bodies (ALBs) to help improve performance.
- The ELBs have issued guidance to schools highlighting the priority of invoice authorisation and need to speed up the process of getting invoices quickly to their ELB for payment. They also investigate individual cases of late payment with the relevant school; and
- ELBs have provided training and workshops to re-iterate the importance of paying suppliers on time.

Capital School Projects

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Education to detail (ii) the 39 capital school projects that were completed; and (ii) the 52 capital school projects that were not completed in the last Programme for Government period, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 5666/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Public Service Agreement (PSA 16), contained within the Programme for Government stated that the building projects would be advanced at over 100 schools over the period to 2011.

There were 108 major capital projects on my Departments Investment Delivery Plan (IDP). Of these 39 projects have been completed (see appendix A) and there are a further 17 projects were construction work is currently progressing on site (see appendix B). This represents capital investment in the schools estate of over £536m.

The balance of 52 projects is listed in Appendix C.

Going forward I have commissioned the ELB'S working in close conjunction with CCMS and the other sectors to coordinate a strategic area planning process to determine the future pattern of education delivery. Previously identified projects, including those projects not started under the previous Programme for Government, will be critically assessed alongside all other potential projects as part of the planning process.

Appendix A

School Projects Completed	**Parliamentary Constituency**
Orangefield Primary School, Belfast	Belfast East
Glendhu Nursery School	Belfast East
Ravenscroft Nursery School	Belfast East
Ashfield Girls' High School, Belfast	Belfast East
Grosvenor Grammar School, Belfast	Belfast East
Our Lady & St Patrick's College, Knock	Belfast East
Belfast Boys' Model School	Belfast North
Belfast Model School for Girls	Belfast North
Whitehouse Primary School	Belfast North
De La Salle College, Belfast	Belfast West
St Dominic's High School, Belfast	Belfast West
Moorfields Primary School	North Antrim
St Mary's Primary School, Portglenone	North Antrim
St Patrick's & St Brigid's P.S. Ballycastle	North Antrim
Templepatrick Primary School	South Antrim
Ballinderry Primary School	Lagan Valley
Pond Park Primary School, Lisburn	Lagan Valley
Ballymacrickett Primary School	Lagan Valley
Brookefield Special School, Moira	Lagan Valley
Towerview Primary School, Bangor	North Down
Bangor Academy	North Down
St Patrick's Primary School, Saul	South Down
St Patrick's G.S. Downpatrick	South Down
Victoria Primary School, Newtownards	Strangford
St Joseph's Primary School, Carryduff	Strangford
Assumption G.S. Ballynahinch	Strangford
St Catherine's College, Armagh	Newry and Armagh
St Colman's College, Newry	Newry and Armagh
Abbey Grammar School, Newry	Newry and Armagh
St Peter's Primary School, Cloughreagh	Newry and Armagh
Waringstown Primary School	Upper Bann
Burnfoot/Dungiven/Largy Primary School	East Derry
Lisbellaw Primary School	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
Mount Lourdes Grammar School, Enniskillen	Fermanagh and South Tyrone

School Projects Completed	Parliamentary Constituency
Lisnagelvin Primary School	Foyle
St Cecilia's College, Derry	Foyle
St Mary's College, Derry	Foyle
Holy Cross College, Strabane	West Tyrone
Drumragh Integrated College, Omagh	West Tyrone

Appendix B

School	Parliamentary Constituency
Coranny & Cornagague Primary School	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
Taughmonagh Primary School Belfast	Belfast South
Strathearn Grammar School Belfast	Belfast East
Lagan College Belfast	Belfast East
Scoil Na Fuiseoige Primary School	Belfast West
St Marys Primary School Newcastle	South Down
Carrick Primary School Warrenpoint	South Down
Banbridge Academy	South Down
Bangor Grammar School	North Down
St Oliver Plunkett Primary School	Newry and Armagh
St Josephs Primary School Madden	Newry and Armagh
Dromintee Primary School	Newry and Armagh
St Columba's Primary School Straw	Mid Ulster
Magherafelt High School	Mid Ulster
Magherafelt Primary School & Nusery School	Mid Ulster
St Colmans Primary School Lambeg	Lagan Valley
Torbank Special School	Strangford

Appendix C

School	Parliamentary Constituency
Strandtown P.S. Belfast	Belfast East
Victoria Park P.S. Belfast	Belfast East
Greenwood Assessment Centre Belfast	Belfast East
Mitchell House Special School Belfast	Belfast East
Glenwood P.S. / Edenderry Nursery School Belfast	Belfast North
Little Flower Girsl School, Belfast	Belfast North
Knockbreda H.S. Belfast	Belfast South
Methodist College Belfast	Belfast South
Victoria College Belfast	Belfast South
Springhill P.S. Belfast	Belfast West

School	Parliamentary Constituency
Colaiste Feirste Belfast	Belfast West
Ballykelly P.S.	East Derry
Rossmar Special School Limavady	East Derry
Enniskillen P.S.	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Devenish College	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
St Paul's P.S. Irvinestown	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
St Patrick's Academy Dungannon	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Ebrington P.S.	Foyle
Eglinton P.S.	Foyle
Newbuildings P.S.	Foyle
Belmont House Special School Londonderry	Foyle
Foyle College	Foyle
Dromore Central P.S.	Lagan Valley
Holy Family P.S. Magherafelt	Mid Ulster
Rainey Endowed School Magherafelt	Mid Ulster
Edendork P.S. Dungannon	Mid Ulster
Holy Trinity College Cookstown	Mid Ulster
St Clare's & St Colman's Abbey P.S. Newry	Newry & Armagh
St Joseph's Convent P.S. Newry	Newry & Armagh
St Patrick's G.S. Armagh	Newry & Armagh
Ballymoney H.S.	North Antrim
Holywood P.S. / Redburn P.S. / Priory College	North Down
St Columbanus College Bangor	North Down
Parkhall Controlled Integrated College, Antrim	South Antrim
Knockevin Special School Downpatrick	South Down
St Bronagh's P.S. Rostrevor	South Down
St Louis G.S. Kilkeel	South Down
Glastry College Ballyhalbert	Strangford
The High School Ballynahinch	Strangford
Lurgan College	Upper Bann
Portadown College	Upper Bann
St Mary's P.S. Banbridge	Upper Bann
St Teresa's P.S. Lurgan	Upper Bann
Tannaghmore P.S. Lurgan	Upper Bann
St Patrick's College Banbridge	Upper Bann
Artigarvin P.S.	West Tyrone
Arvalee Special School Omagh	West Tyrone
Omagh Integrated P.S.	West Tyrone

School	Parliamentary Constituency
St Columbkille's P.S. Carrickmore	West Tyrone
St Conor's P.S. Omagh	West Tyrone
Dean Maguirc College Carrickmore	West Tyrone
Loreto G.S. Omagh	West Tyrone

Schools: Former Sites

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to list all sites of former schools owned by his Department that are currently not in use. **(AQW 5715/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not own any schools in the various education sectors. In the non-controlled sector, the Department does not normally hold information about the subsequent use of sites of former schools so it is not possible to identify if a particular site is actually vacant. The Department can, however, provide information regarding the controlled sector. The following information has been provided by the Education and Library Boards:

Board	Former School Premises Not in Use
BELB	Site at Shore Crescent
BELB	Beechfield Primary School
BELB	Grove Primary School
BELB	Mersey Street Primary School
BELB	Mount Gilbert Community College Site
BELB	Part of former Forthbridge School Site
BELB	Vere Foster Primary School
BELB	School of Music Building, Donegall Pass
SELB	Minterburn Primary School
SELB	Tamnamore Primary School
SELB	Clogher Regional Primary School
WELB	Burnfoot Primary School
WELB	Dungiven Primary School
WELB	Duke Of Westminster High School, Ballinamallard
WELB	Duke Of Westminster High School, Kesh
WELB	Faughan Valley High School
NEELB	Antiville Primary School
NEELB	Ballypriormore Primary School
NEELB	Carnalridge Primary School
NEELB	Garvagh Surplus Land
NEELB	Glenarm Primary School
NEELB	Maghera High School
NEELB	Roddensvale Site
SEELB	Drumbo Primary School
SEELB	Hillhall Primary School
SEELB	Lambeg Primary School
SEELB	Lower Ballinderry Primary School

Board	Former School Premises Not in Use
SEELB	Newport Primary School
SEELB	Newtownbreda Primary School
SEELB	Kindle Primary School
SEELB	Hilden Integrated Primary School
SEELB	Gransha High School
SEELB	Lisnasharragh High School
SEELB	Killard House General
SEELB	Ballykillaire Site
SEELB	New Special School - (Ballylesson)

Schools: Amalgamation

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Education to outline the procedure that is followed when two schools amalgamate; and what is the process under which teachers can retain their current positions.
(AQW 5729/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A proposal to amalgamate two or more schools originates with the relevant managing authorities and requires the publication of a supporting Development Proposal. This is a statutory process which facilitates extensive consultation both with those directly affected by the proposal and with the wider community. I make a decision on the proposal, based on all the pertinent facts, which include details of the location of the amalgamated school, accommodation implications, implications for teaching and other staff and comments received.

A Collective Agreement is drawn up by the Boards of Governors of the schools to be amalgamated. The Collective Agreement provides for all permanent teachers in the merging schools to be offered employment in the new school, provided they sign a declaration accepting the conditions of the Agreement.

A teacher may either accept the terms of the Agreement and take up a post at the new school or opt for voluntary redundancy, with compensation terms at the discretion of the employing authority. There is no compulsory redundancy for those permanent teachers who transfer to the new school in the two years immediately following the date of the amalgamation.

Teachers who held posts of responsibility in the merging schools must apply for posts of responsibility in the new school which are at least equivalent to the level of the responsibility they held. If they suffer a reduction in salary as a result of the amalgamation they are eligible to apply to the Department for a re-organisation allowance.

Schools Budget

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how much of the additional £40 million allocated to the schools budget will be (i) capital spend; and (ii) revenue spend.
(AQW 5731/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I can confirm that all of the additional £40 million allocated to the schools budget will be revenue spend.

Schools: Boards of Governors

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education which schools' Boards of Governors have not been reconstituted since 2008.
(AQW 5734/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Boards of Governors of all grant-aided schools were either fully or partially reconstituted in the 2009/10 school year. Boards of Governors contain members from several different categories and vacancies will often exist on many Boards under different categories.

The education system is working to ensure that Boards of Governors have their full complement of members. In the case of those members appointed by the Department of Education, which are considered public appointments, I am progressing appointments where I have an adequate choice of candidates and proactively advertising for more prospective governors to come forward so that this exercise can be completed.

Schools: Year 12 Students

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail the percentage of Year 12 students from a (i) Catholic background; and (ii) Protestant background who achieved five A*-C GCSE grades in each of the last five years.
(AQW 5789/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information is not available in this format for Year 12 students but is available for all those pupils leaving school each academic year and this information is provided in the table below:

The percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (inc. equivalents) by religion of pupil 2005/06 to 2009/10

	(i) Catholic	(ii) Protestant
2005/2006	65.4%	62.1%
2006/2007	66.6%	62.8%
2007/2008	68.5%	65.5%
2008/2009	71.5%	68.5%
2009/2010	73.4%	70.5%

Source: School Leavers Survey

Education: Border Areas

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the financial savings that could be made from increased co-operation with the Dublin Government in relation to education in border areas.
(AQW 5790/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department and the Department of Education and Skills intend to commission a survey to estimate the potential cross-border take-up of education provision. The results of the survey will inform the area planning of education delivery in the border area.

Whilst it is too early to estimate financial savings, removing barriers to cross-border take-up will ensure that we make the most efficient use of resources, as well as providing more choice for children and young people.

Special Educational Needs

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Education (i) whether the South Eastern Education and Library Board provides post-16 provision for students with mild learning difficulties in special schools and; (ii) what plans there are to introduce provision for all students with mild learning difficulties in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area.
(AQW 5804/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Special educational needs (SEN) provision is matched to the individual needs of the child. Provision for students with moderate learning difficulties (MLD) may, therefore, be made in special units attached to mainstream schools or in mainstream classes as well as in special schools.

The South-eastern Education and Library Board has confirmed that students with MLD are considered on this individual basis for post-16 education and provision is made in special schools where that is appropriate for the young person. This will continue to be the case in the future.

Special Educational Needs

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of schools in the South Eastern Education Library Board area which provide post-16 provision for students with (a) severe learning difficulties; and (b) mild learning difficulties; and (ii) the number of schools outside the South Eastern Education and Library Board area which provide post-16 provision for students with (a) severe learning difficulties; and (b) mild learning difficulties.
(AQW 5805/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Special educational needs (SEN) provision is matched to the individual needs of the child. Provision for students with severe learning difficulties (SLD) and moderate learning difficulties (MLD) may, therefore, be made in special units attached to mainstream schools or in mainstream classes as well as in special schools.

I have been advised by the Education and Library Boards that the number of special schools which cater specifically for post-16 SLD and MLD students is as follows:-

	SLD	MLD
BELB	1	1
NEELB	6	1
SEELB	4	0
SELB	5	0

	SLD	MLD
WELB	2	5*

* 3 of these schools are classed as mixed schools in that they have pupils with MLD and SLD.

Schoolchildren: Cookstown and Magherafelt

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Education how many school children travel from the Cookstown District Council area to schools in Magherafelt, broken down by (a) school; and (b) the number of pupils traveling to each school.
(AQW 5806/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested in AQW 5806/11-15 and AQW 5807/11-15 is detailed in the following tables:

(i) Schools in the Magherafelt District Council area attended by pupils resident in Cookstown District Council area in 2011/12

School name	School type	Pupils from Cookstown D.C. area
Anahorish Primary School	Primary	*
Castledawson Primary School	Primary	*
Desertmartin Primary School	Primary	*
Gaelscoil na Spéiríní	Primary	*
Holy Family Primary School	Primary	17
Kilross Primary School	Primary	*
Knocknagin Primary School	Primary	*
Maghera Primary School	Primary	*
Magherafelt Controlled Primary School	Primary	9
New Row Primary School	Primary	*
Spires Integrated Primary School	Primary	20
St Columba's Primary School, Draperstown	Primary	*
St Eoghan's Primary School, Draperstown	Primary	*
St Mary's Primary School, Draperstown	Primary	*
St Mary's Primary School, Bellaghy	Primary	*
St Trea's Primary School, Ballyronan	Primary	15
Magherafelt High School	Post primary	44
Rainey Endowed School	Post primary	134
Sperrin Integrated College	Post primary	100
St Colm's High School, Draperstown	Post primary	*
St Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt	Post primary	311
St Patrick's Co-ed Comprehensive College, Maghera	Post primary	7
St Pius X College, Magherafelt	Post primary	374
Kilronan Special School	Special	20
Total		**1,070**

(ii) Schools in the Cookstown District Council area attended by pupils resident in Magherafelt District Council area in 2011/12

School name	School type	Pupils from Magherafelt D.C. area
Ballylifford Primary School	Primary	*
Cookstown Primary School	Primary	*
Gaelscoil an tSeanchaí	Primary	16
Holy Trinity Primary School, Cookstown	Primary	*
Moneymore Primary School	Primary	26
St Joseph's Primary School, Cookstown	Primary	*
St Patrick's Primary School, Moneymore	Primary	5
St Patrick's Primary School, Loup	Primary	30
Woods Primary School	Primary	89
Cookstown High School	Post primary	20
Holy Trinity College	Post primary	5
Total		**199**

Source: NI school census

Note: Figures for primary schools include pupils in nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.

* denotes fewer than 5 pupils.

In answer to AQW 5809/11-15 and AQW 5810/11-15, I am informed by the Education and Library Boards that 1,005 pupils travelling from the Cookstown district council area to schools in Magherafelt and 44 pupils travelling from the Magherafelt district council area to Cookstown are eligible to receive transport assistance for travel by bus.

Schoolchildren: Cookstown and Magherafelt

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Education how many school children travel from the Magherafelt District Council area to schools in Cookstown, broken down by (a) school; and (b) the number of pupils traveling to each school.
(AQW 5807/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested in AQW 5806/11-15 and AQW 5807/11-15 is detailed in the tables below:

(i) Schools in the Magherafelt District Council area attended by pupils resident in Cookstown District Council area in 2011/12

School name	School type	Pupils from Cookstown D.C. area
Anahorish Primary School	Primary	*
Castledawson Primary School	Primary	*
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Gaelscoil na Spéiríní	Primary	*
Holy Family Primary School	Primary	17
Kilross Primary School	Primary	*
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Maghera Primary School	Primary	*
Magherafelt Controlled Primary School	Primary	9
New Row Primary School	Primary	*
Spires Integrated Primary School	Primary	20
St Columba's Primary School, Draperstown	Primary	*

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Schoolchildren: Cookstown and Magherafelt

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Education how many school children who travel from the Cookstown District Council area to schools in Magherafelt receive free bus transport.
(AQW 5809/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested in AQW 5806/11-15 and AQW 5807/11-15 is detailed in the tables below:

(i) Schools in the Magherafelt District Council area attended by pupils resident in Cookstown District Council area in 2011/12

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Schoolchildren: Cookstown and Magherafelt

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Education how many school children who travel from the Magherafelt District Council area to schools in Cookstown receive free bus transport.
(AQW 5810/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested in AQW 5806/11-15 and AQW 5807/11-15 is detailed in the tables below:

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DE: Translation Costs

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education how much his Department has spent on translating departmental publications into minority languages in each of the last four years, broken down by language.
(AQW 5825/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The amount the Department of Education has spent on translating departmental publications into minority/alternative languages in each of the last four years was as follows:

2007/2008

Language	
Albanian	£82
Arabic	£71
Bulgarian	£71
Cantonese	£622
Czech	£71
Fijian	£82

Language	
Hindi	£82
Hungarian	£71
Irish	£3,215
Italian	£59
Latvian	£479
Lithuanian	£1,008
Malayalam	£82
Malaysian	£82
Mandarin	£704
Nepalese	£82
Philipino	£82
Polish	£1,206
Portuguese	£841
Russian	£94
Shona	£82
Slovak	£71
Spanish	£59
Swahili	£82
Tagalog	£82
Thai	£94
Ulster-Scots	£108
Urdu	£82

2008/2009

Language	
Cantonese	£1,145
Farsi	£94
Filipino	£373
Irish	£39,422
Lithuanian	£963
Mandarin	£247
Polish	£926
Portuguese	£883
Romanian	£82
Slovak	£112
Tagalog	£607
Ulster-Scots	£238

2009/2010

Language	
Cantonese	£1,492
Filipino	£277
Irish	£31,503
Latvian	£710
Lithuanian	£1,195
Mandarin	£925
Polish	£1,081
Portuguese	£987
Slovak	£256
Tagalog	£334
Turkish	£710

2010/2011

Language	
Arabic	£45
Bengali	£45
Cantonese	£657
Hindi	£45
Hungarian	£525
Irish	£32,096
Latvian	£525
Lithuanian	£565
Mandarin	£657
Polish	£565
Portuguese	£474
Punjabi	£45
Slovak	£565
Tagalog	£40
Turkish	£525
Urdu	£45

Classroom Assistants

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education to detail the average cost of a classroom assistant in each Education and Library Board area.
(AQW 5826/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have been advised by the Education and Library Boards that the following sums represent the average cost of a classroom assistant in each of their organisations. This is a very broad average based on costs incurred in 2010/2011 divided by an average head count of Classroom Assistants for that year.

	Cost per annum (including employers costs)
BELB	£15,408

	Cost per annum (including employers costs)
WELB	£18,282
NEELB	£7,175
SEELB	£20,501
SELB	£10,000

Academic Selection

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education whether grammar schools in the Dickson Plan Area have the legal right to operate academic selection.
(AQW 5827/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The position pertaining to grammar schools within the Dickson Plan area is the same as that which applies to all other schools.

Schools are required to "have regard to" the Department's guidance on post-primary transfer which recommends that schools do not use academic admissions criteria. Aside from this no legislation provides for academic admissions criteria either prohibitively or otherwise.

Aggregated Schools Budget

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the impact of the five percent reduction in funding on (i) the number of teachers employed; and (ii) the quality of education in schools.
(AQW 5855/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Since Budget 2010 was concluded my predecessor and I have made it clear that education faces unprecedented challenges. The intention was to protect frontline services as much as possible. Because of the scale of the Aggregated Schools Budget (ASB) it was impossible to protect it totally. I have reviewed the budget allocations and last month I mitigated the impact on the ASB by reallocating £40m from my budget into it over the next 3 years. Otherwise next year's decrease in the ASB would have been more than 3%. The harsh reality is that the cuts imposed on this Administration by the British Government have severely impacted upon the future schools budget. These reductions will in turn mean that schools will face job losses – both in teaching and non teaching staff in the future.

(i) **Number of teachers employed**

At this stage it is too early to predict the impact of the 5% reduction in funding in terms of employment of teachers. Some 80% of schools' expenditure is staff related – so there will inevitably be an impact on staff if costs are to be contained within budget.

Under the Local Management of Schools (LMS) arrangements, the final decision for schools on how to live within their budget rests with the Principal and Board of Governors. It is therefore both inappropriate and logistically impossible to anticipate the individual decisions made across 1,200 schools.

(ii) **Quality of education in schools**

Schools should make best use of resources available to them and, through their planning and budget-setting, ensure that the raising of standards for all their pupils remains a priority. Performance data and inspection evidence indicates that we have considerable scope to improve quality of provision and the standards achieved by pupils here.

As my school improvement policy sets out, the quality of education in schools depends on the quality of leadership, the aspirations schools hold for their pupils, the quality of teaching and strong links with parents and the community. Given the budget situation we face, it is more important than ever that schools plan and prioritise to maintain and further develop these key factors.

Council for Catholic Maintained Schools: Buildings

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education whether his Department pays to maintain the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools buildings through the minor works programme or by any other mechanism.
(AQW 5860/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards are responsible for the maintenance of controlled and maintained school premises. The Boards have discretion to determine the amounts to be allocated each year on maintenance from within their overall budgets. Controlled and maintained schools may also use their delegated budgets for small maintenance items. The Department also provides grant aid to the Trustees of maintained schools to fund minor works projects.

Grammar School Attendance: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what percentage of pupils living in each ward in the North Down area currently attends a grammar school.
(AQW 5870/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Percentage of post-primary school pupils resident in each ward in the North Down constituency, who attended grammar schools in 2011/12

Ward Name	% pupils attending grammar schools
Ballycrochan	61.9
Ballyholme	83.9
Ballymaconnell	62.6
Ballymagee	52.5
Bangor Castle	60.4
Bloomfield (North Down)	39.4
Broadway	67.8
Bryansburn	66.7
Churchill	65.3
Clandeboye	46.0
Conlig	48.7
Craigavad	89.4
Crawfordsburn	88.6
Cultra	85.8
Donaghadee North	71.6
Donaghadee South	41.9
Dufferin	26.5
Groomsport	65.7
Harbour (North Down)	62.9
Holywood Demesne	71.0
Holywood Priory	83.8
Loughview	31.4
Millisle	41.7
Princetown	87.5
Rathgael	39.3
Silverstream	34.2
Spring Hill	49.5
Whitehill	29.8

Source: NI school census

Irish Language Officers

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 5302/11-15, what urgent work was carried out by Irish Language Officers.
(AQW 5887/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The urgent translation work undertaken by the Department's Irish Language Officers, which was referred to in AQW 5302/11-15, included translating speeches, statements to the Assembly, press releases and letters.

Irish Language Officers

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 5302/11-15, what tasks are carried out by Irish Language Officers, other than translation work.
(AQW 5888/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Irish language Officer tasks include facilitating meetings where Irish is or is likely to be spoken, handling telephone calls in Irish, overseeing and supporting the Department's Language Policy for Irish and dealing with enquiries on Irish language issues.

Bangor Central Integrated Primary School

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education whether he will meet, as a matter of urgency, with the Principal of Bangor Central Integrated Primary School and MLAs representing the North Down constituency to discuss the future of the school.
(AQW 5893/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As I set out in my statement on 26 September 2011, I have commissioned the five Education and Library Boards, working with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and other sectors, to co-ordinate a strategic area planning process to shape the future pattern of education provision.

Schools previously identified as needing a new build, including that for Bangor Central Integrated Primary School, will be critically assessed alongside all other potential projects as part of the area planning process to determine how they will contribute to the overall structure needed. However, until the area planning work is completed, I will not be in a position to comment on a possible new build for any school and hence it would not be appropriate to meet at this time.

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment: Translation Costs

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of translating and publishing the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment documents, including exam papers and support materials, into (i) Ulster Scots; (ii) Polish; or (iii) any other language, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 5913/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment has confirmed that the cost of translating and publishing its documents, including exam papers and support materials, into (i) Ulster Scots; (ii) Polish; or (iii) any other language, in each of the last five years, is as follows:

Language	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011
Ulster Scots	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
Polish	£0	£0	£0	£45	£0
Other - Irish (AQW 5303/11-15)	£98,028	£75,858	£152,578	£455,213	£598,828
Other	£0	£0	£0	£135	£0

General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the annual running costs of the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland in each of the last five years.
(AQW 5916/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The General Teaching Council is primarily self-funding through the collection of annual registration fees from teachers.

I can confirm the total expenditure per the accounts that were laid before the Assembly in respect of 2006/07, 2007/08 and 2008/09 are as stated below.

2006/2007 £1,008,536

2007/2008 £1,148,308

2008/2009 £1,082,456

Accounts for the years 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 have yet to be laid before the Assembly; however draft unaudited Accounts set out total expenditure as follows:

2009/2010 £1,201,305

2010/2011 £1,156,909

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment: Annual Running Costs

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the annual running costs of the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment in each of the last five years.
(AQW 5918/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment has confirmed annual running costs in each of the last five years as follows:

Year	Gross Expenditure £000s	Earned Income £000s	Net Expenditure £000s
2006/07	29,248	8,341	20,907
2007/08	30,242	8,565	21,677
2008/09	30,384	9,133	21,251
2009/10	31,272	9,402	21,870
2010/11	27,822	9,569	18,253

Education and Skills Authority

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education whether schools can submit development proposals prior to the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority in June 2012.
(AQW 5931/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Skills Authority (ESA) will be established on 1 April 2013. The Bill to establish the ESA will contain new provisions on area planning and development proposals. Until that legislation comes into operation, development proposals may be brought forward under the existing legislation. The relevant provision is Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986.

Primary Languages Programme

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Education whether he plans to continue funding the Primary Languages Programme.
(AQW 5952/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As you will be aware, the education budget faces significant challenges over the period to 2014-15. I am currently reviewing my budget allocations for the next three years and until this exercise is complete I am unable to confirm any future budget allocations for the Primary Languages Programme.

Education and Skills Authority

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education what powers the Sector Support Bodies will have under the new Education and Skills Authority.
(AQW 5992/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Education sectoral bodies will be non-statutory organisations, funded by grant-aid from my Department. As such they will have no formal powers in education legislation. The functions of each body will be determined following the consideration of business cases by my Department.

Education: Young People from Disadvantaged Backgrounds

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education what proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C, including English and Maths, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6034/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The table below provides details of the percentage of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (measured by their entitlement to free school meals) achieving at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (inc. equivalents) including GCSE English and maths by school type 2007/08 to 2009/10

	Non Grammar	Grammar	Total
2007/2008	19.0%	85.5%	27.7%
2008/2009	20.1%	88.4%	29.7%
2009/2010	21.3%	87.8%	31.3%

Source: School Leavers Survey

Education: Young People from Disadvantaged Backgrounds

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education what proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, who attended non-grammar schools, achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C, including English and Maths, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6035/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The table below provides details of the percentage of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (measured by their entitlement to free school meals) achieving at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (inc. equivalents) including GCSE English and maths by school type 2007/08 to 2009/10

	Non Grammar	Grammar	Total
2007/2008	19.0%	85.5%	27.7%
2008/2009	20.1%	88.4%	29.7%
2009/2010	21.3%	87.8%	31.3%

Source: School Leavers Survey

Education: Young People from Disadvantaged Backgrounds

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education what proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, who attended grammar schools, achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C, including English and Maths, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6036/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The table below provides details of the percentage of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (measured by their entitlement to free school meals) achieving at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (inc. equivalents) including GCSE English and maths by school type 2007/08 to 2009/10

	Non Grammar	Grammar	Total
2007/2008	19.0%	85.5%	27.7%
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2009/2010	21.3%	87.8%	31.3%

Source: School Leavers Survey

Department for Employment and Learning

Certificate of Religious Education

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much it costs for a student at Stranmillis University College, Belfast to sit the Catholic Certificate of Religious Education in Glasgow; and whether his Department covers the travel and accommodation costs.
(AQW 5392/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): The current fee for the Certificate of Religious Education at the University of Glasgow is £480. This is funded by my Department through grant paid to Stranmillis University College. As the course is delivered through distance learning there no requirement for students to travel to the university.

Certificate of Religious Education

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why students from Stranmillis University College, Belfast are unable to sit the Catholic Certificate of Religious Education in Northern Ireland and must instead travel to Glasgow.
(AQW 5393/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Certificate of Religious Education course at the University of Glasgow is delivered through distance learning. There is no requirement for students to travel to the university.

Students from Stranmillis University College are also able to study for the Certificate through the Iona Retreat Centre in Derry or through a Life-light Home Study Course.

Holylands Area of Belfast: Community Relations Co-ordinator

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the circumstances, including the relevant dates, which led to the withdrawal of a liaison officer from the Holylands area of Belfast after an alleged threat from a student.
(AQW 5394/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have written to the Vice Chancellor of the University of Ulster on this issue and he has responded with the following information.

The University Community Relations Co-ordinator responded to a complaint on 19 September 2011 from a resident regarding a property in the Holylands. On 20 September 2011 the Community Relations Co-ordinator visited the house where the alleged incident took place and spoke with the tenants. The situation was considered to be threatening by the Community Relations Coordinator who left the area and reported the incident to the University. This incident identified a number of health and safety issues and concerns about the work the Community Relations Co-ordinator has undertaken in the area in the past few years, primarily, that of undertaking visits to students' houses to investigate complaints raised by statutory agencies and local residents. The University has been advised that she cannot go out on the ground to undertake visits on her own during the day or in the evening until these health and safety issues are resolved.

The Community Relations Co-ordinator remains active in the Holylands attending Policing, Partners and Community Together (PACT) and related resident group meetings, and is still dealing with complaints about anti-social behaviour.

The University is currently investigating this incident in line with its student disciplinary procedures. The University is conducting a health and safety review of its community relations work, and is investigating the potential for joint visits with staff from Queens University and Belfast City Council.

I will be seeking further updates from the University on this issue.

I trust you find this information helpful.

DEL: Payment of Invoices

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what proportion of invoices for construction work his Department, and its arm's-length bodies, have paid on time in each of the last three years.
(AQW 5413/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning and its arm's-length bodies paid the following proportion of invoices for construction work on time:

	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011
Department for Employment and Learning	100 %*	50%*	85%
Labour Relations Agency	88%	67%	85%
CITB – ConstructionSkills Northern Ireland	100%	N/A	N/A
Ulster Supported Employment Ltd	N/A	N/A	N/A

* The number of invoices involved for the Department is low, one for 2008-2009 and two for 2009-2010.

The basis for calculation for the percentages of invoices paid on time for construction work has been calculated as less than or equal to 30 days from invoice received date to payment date.

Stranmillis University College and Queen's University Belfast: Proposed Merger

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he will give a commitment that his Department will investigate any claims from staff at Stranmillis University College, Belfast that they are being put under undue pressure over the proposed merger with Queen's University, Belfast.
(AQW 5414/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have stated on several occasions recently that Stranmillis University College is an autonomous body. There are internal procedures to deal with any grievances raised by staff and there are recognised trade unions within the College which assist staff in these matters. I have recently made an offer to meet with staff at Stranmillis to discuss my recent announcement.

Stranmillis University College

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why Stranmillis University College, Belfast did not elect a new Board of Governors in May 2010.
(AQW 5415/11-15)

Dr Farry: In accordance with the Colleges of Education (NI) Order 2005 and the College's Instrument of Government, only three members of the Stranmillis Governing Body are elected. The Principal is appointed by virtue of her office, while up to 10

members (including the Chair) are appointed following public competitions run in accordance with Commissioner for Public Appointments Northern Ireland (CPANI) guidelines. Of those elected, none were due for re-election in May 2010.

Unemployment: Kilcooley Estate, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what his Department is doing to reduce unemployment in the Kilcooley Estate, Bangor.
(AQW 5416/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department is committed to reducing unemployment for all individuals across Northern Ireland irrespective of where they live.

Bangor JobCentre which covers the Kilcooley area offers a range of services, initiatives and programmes to help jobseekers find employment, particularly people who are unemployed, individuals with disabilities and those with other barriers to work. Services include job search, help with writing a CV or job application forms, preparing for interviews, careers guidance, or help with travel costs for job interviews.

From 1 April 2010 -31 March 2010 and despite the economic downturn, Bangor JobCentre advertised 1,568 job vacancies. In the current year to the end of October 999 vacancies have been advertised.

Unemployed clients in Kilcooley can participate in the Steps to Work programme which is the Department's main adult return to work programme. The aim of Steps to Work is to assist people who are unemployed or economically inactive to find and sustain employment. Since its introduction in September 2008, the programme has helped 10,365 people find work across Northern Ireland.

Last year (1 April -31 March 2011) Bangor JobCentre placed 202 unemployed Steps to Work clients into employment. This year to date 256 Steps to Work clients have been placed in employment.

In the Kilcooley area there are currently 118 clients claiming Jobseekers Allowance of which sixty are on the Steps to Work programme. This represents over 50% currently being directly supported to assist them in securing employment. A further ten clients from the Kilcooley area have recently completed the programme, of these ten, three secured jobs. The remainder are not yet required to attend but will in due course also receive the support of the Bangor Jobcentre and be able to participate on the Steps to Work programme.

Other Departmental training programmes, such as ApprenticeshipsNI and Training for Success, are also available across Northern Ireland. These opportunities are open to eligible people from the Kilcooley area and staff at the Bangor Jobcentre provide advice on these.

Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the areas in his budget that are earmarked for tackling drug and alcohol abuse.
(AQW 5418/11-15)

Dr Farry: There are no areas or resources specifically earmarked in the DEL budget for tackling drug or alcohol abuse. Clients, however, seeking work with a history of drug or alcohol misuse can receive help and support through the Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS) or the new Work Connect programme being introduced in the New Year to replace the former New Deal for Disabled People programme.

DEL: Private Finance Initiatives

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many Private Finance Initiative capital projects his Department has agreed for new capital builds in the next three financial years.
(AQW 5419/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department has not agreed any Private Finance Initiative capital projects for new capital builds in the next three financial years. We are of course open to examining alternative funding models, although ultimately all of these are dependant on budget availability.

DEL: Information Service

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many staff are employed in his Department's Information Service; and what is the annual cost of this service.
(AQW 5420/11-15)

Dr Farry: The number of staff employed in my Department's Information Service is detailed in the attached table. The annual cost of this service at the end of the last financial year totalled £557,923.

Function	Grade	Number
Press Office	Principal Information Officer	1
	Senior Information Officer	1
	Assistant Information Officer	2
Marketing and Internal Communications	Senior Information Officer	1
	Information Officer	2
	Executive Officer Grade 1	1
	Assistant Information Officer	1
Information Technology (Internet; Intranet; Website design)	Staff Officer	1
	Executive Officer Grade 1	1
	Executive Officer Grade 2	1
Administrative Support	Executive Officer Grade 1	1
	Executive Officer Grade 2	1
	Administrative Officers	3

Adult Education Programmes

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he intends to develop new approaches to encourage men to engage in adult education programmes and for young men to enter non-traditional professions.
(AQW 5450/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department aims to ensure that all of its programmes and services are fully inclusive.

The Department's Careers Service continues to provide impartial careers information, advice and guidance to all clients. This includes challenging pre-conceived careers ideas, making clients aware of up-to-date labour market and occupational information, encouraging consideration of a broad range of career options, and providing information on appropriate education and training.

The Department's Training for Success and Programme-Led Apprenticeship programmes allow participants to follow training in their chosen occupational area. At present, around 70% of those on the Training for Success and Programme-Led Apprenticeships programmes are male;

similarly, current occupancy figures for apprentices indicate that approximately 50% are male.

In Further Education, colleges have a statutory duty to address any significant gender imbalance in enrolments. Colleges continue to promote provision to all sections of the community, particular those groups, including men, which might be less inclined to engage in third level learning.

Apprenticeships

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what further action his Department can take to help young people to get into apprenticeships.
(AQW 5480/11-15)

Dr Farry: Apprenticeships offer a valuable option for young people to gain skills and knowledge in order to prepare them for working life and for a career.

ApprenticeshipsNI programme is employer-led, and as such, it is employers, and not my Department, that create apprenticeships. However, despite current economic and fiscal difficulties, current occupancy figures are very encouraging, as the number of employed young people undertaking apprenticeship training is 46% of the total number of apprentices.

The apprenticeship training package on offer to employers is attractive, in that the apprentices' directed training costs are met by my Department. Such funding ranges from £2,600 to £10,800 depending on the level and occupational area of study and, on completion, an incentive bonus of up to £1,500 is paid to the employer. I am determined to protect this funding for 16-24 year olds in the anticipation that it will encourage employers to utilise apprentices whilst supporting young people with their future career opportunities.

To complement the Apprenticeship NI provision and support school leavers the Department makes available Programme-Led Apprenticeships. This programme offers unemployed 16 and 17 year olds the opportunity to achieve a level 2 apprenticeship framework and positions them to progress once they find a job in their chosen occupational area.

The Department's Careers Service offers impartial careers information, advice, and guidance to all clients. During the guidance process careers advisers discuss apprenticeships as an option, where appropriate for the client. If an apprenticeship is a suitable option, the client is provided with programme information, including details on how to access training and where provision is available.

In addition, the Department runs apprenticeship advertising campaigns each year, from July to mid-September, targeting both employers and potential apprentices and this will continue in 2012.

Students: Work Experience

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action his Department can take to help students get work experience positions with local businesses.
(AQW 5481/11-15)

Dr Farry: Through the universities' and university colleges' student employability services, current students have access to a range of course-related and non course-related work placements. Each institution's careers advisers assist students in gaining work experience and advertise a number of placement opportunities. Further information on the range of university and university college provision is attached at Annex A.

In addition, the International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience (IAESTE) programme, funded by the Department of Education, provides higher education students with technical work experience in a number of worldwide countries. My Department funds a number of other programmes to improve higher education students' employability skills with periods of study or employment abroad, including the Study USA, Study China and the Erasmus programmes.

For students attending Further Education (FE) Colleges, all six colleges in Northern Ireland enable students enrolled in Further Education, Higher Education and training programmes to undertake work placements, where available, to support their learning.

My Department has also worked closely with Career Academies UK since 2008. Career Academies are typically aimed at middle achieving, but highly motivated, students between the ages of 16 and 19. They work alongside existing further education provision, but additionally offer students the opportunity to gain valuable experience through initiatives such as paid summer work placements within local businesses and industry led site visits. Companies which have offered local Career Academy students paid summer work placements include Northern Bank, Ulster Bank, Santander, Citi, Seagate and Autoline Insurance. Since 2008, 202 students have been enrolled on the Career Academy programme locally.

Annex A

The University of Ulster

Central to the University of Ulster's vision of leading in the provision of professional education for professional life, the University is committed to supporting graduates to gain stimulating and fulfilling employment. As part of this commitment, the University's objective is to provide students with learning experiences that will give them the confidence, knowledge and skills to enable them to take up challenging employment opportunities and to contribute to the further development of their chosen profession.

The University of Ulster is concerned with applied and vocational education and has one of the largest work-based learning programmes in the UK, with the majority of courses offering placements. In addition, wherever possible, courses are designed in partnership with relevant professional bodies so that students graduate with a qualification that is recognised by their chosen profession.

While studying at Ulster, students can access a wide range of opportunities to undertake work experience with local employers. Examples include:

- A substantial percentage of Ulster's programmes include a period of industrial placement, practice education or practice learning placements. Annually over 2000 students undertake such placements, with the University being one of the largest providers of work-based placements across the HE sector. For example, of the 2000 students undertaking placement activity, some 1200 of these are carrying out year-long work-based placements between the second and final year of their courses.
- As part of Ulster's Certificate in Personal and Professional Development framework all students are offered the opportunity to undertake an 'Employability through Work Experience' module. This enables the University to recognise and accredit students' short-term, part-time or volunteer work experiences. To gain recognition for their activity, students must successfully reflect on how experience gained during a minimum eighty hours with local organisations has improved their employability skills and knowledge of the business sector.
- In June 2011, in response to the current economic downturn and the ongoing difficulties for graduates to find employment, the University of Ulster developed and launched a Professional Experience Programme. The programme is specifically aimed at supporting current graduate leavers from Ulster who are either unemployed or underemployed. The programme includes a 6 month graduate internship with a local employer, integrated with study for Ulster's Graduate Certificate in Professional Practice.

There is no cost to the graduate and the University provides each participant on the programme with a £5000 bursary. Employer costs are minimal (approx. £2000) and include course fees, appropriate travel expenses and a contribution to a student bursary.

- The 'Ulster EDGE Award', launched in September 2011, is an exciting new initiative for undergraduate students. The Award is designed to enhance the employability of Ulster students by encouraging engagement with, and official recognition of, extra-curricular and co-curricular activities and achievements including work experience and volunteering, usually undertaken with local businesses.

Queen's University Belfast

Course related work experience

Where a degree programme contains work placement as an integral component, such as BSc Finance, students are provided with a high level of support. This includes a pre placement programme consisting of:

- annual careers and placement fairs
- employer presentations/briefings on campus
- feedback from students who have returned from placement
- application form/CV and interview preparation
- aptitude test familiarisation (where appropriate)
- access to vacancy database for placement opportunities
- 1:1 guidance and support as they go through the various stages of the selection process.

While on placement, students are supported through regular contact including: visits by a member of academic staff, support from a designated member of staff within the placement organisation and email communication.

Within the University's Management School, the School of Biological Sciences and in Computer Science, there are specialist staff employed to support students seeking a placement as part of their degree.

Non-course related work experience

Where degree programmes do not contain a formal work placement component, students are encouraged to develop their work experience through various options, including:

a) optional year out placement e.g. Study USA

b) vacation internships

c) vacation or part-time employment

d) insight programmes with graduate employers

e) international opportunities e.g. IAESTE placement, Study India, Washington-Ireland Programme

f) business competitions/challenges.

Students are supported in seeking and attaining these opportunities through:

a) access to an up-to-date vacancy database of vacation/placement opportunities

b) annual careers and placement fairs

c) the annual Work Experience Fair

d) employer presentations/briefings

e) application/CV/interview preparation and coaching where appropriate

f) 1:1 guidance and support as they go through the selection process.

The University's Careers, Employability and Skills advisers provide centrally the range of support listed above for students seeking placement/work experience as an optional part of their degree programme

For students on degree programmes which involve education and training (for example, nursing), specialist staff organise and provide support for students on clinical placements.

The University places a high priority on the employability of its graduates and, therefore, recognises the importance of work experience/placement in relation to graduate employment. To this end there is significant engagement with local, national and international businesses to secure access to placements/work experience opportunities for our students.

Some examples of local engagement include:

- 77 (95%) students from Biological Sciences in work placement with local businesses
- 150 (94%) students from Computer Science in work placement within 68 local businesses.

In the academic year 2010/11, 222 local opportunities for work experience/placement/vacation work were advertised by the University's Careers, Employability and Skills Service.

Within degree programmes, placement is accredited through the City and Guilds Senior Licentiateship. Students on non placement degree programmes electing to take an optional placement year, or who secure other forms of work experience, are eligible to seek accreditation under the University Degree Plus framework (www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/degreeplus/).

Access to careers vacancy database

Queen's University allows open access to its vacancy database and has a defined work placement section/search facility. In addition, information and advice is provided on the website to assist students seeking to develop their work experience and skills.

Stranmillis University College

The professional nature of all the College's programmes is such that placement, whether in schools, colleges, early years settings or health and leisure establishments, is an integral part of the course for all students. As such this is organised through the academic departments with responsibility for the course. Thus our careers service is not involved in assisting students find work experience.

In addition, Stranmillis launched its first internship scheme in 2011-12. It is targeted at students who graduated in July 2011 but who had not found full-time employment. Currently we have two interns – one working in the area of Sports Development and the other in the area of Student Support and Widening Access.

St. Mary's University College

Work-related Learning is an integral element of the BA (Hons) Liberal Arts degree programme of St Mary's University College. The college has an academic post to coordinate placements (6-week in duration) for Liberal Arts students in the second and third years of their programme. The placements enable the students to learn directly from the world of work and their learning is demonstrated through the production of a journal.

Case studies of good practice are developed and disseminated through the College website.

Further Education Colleges: Budgets

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail whether each of the six Regional College's stayed within their budget in the last financial year.
(AQW 5482/11-15)

Dr Farry: Further education colleges are permitted to operate annual deficit budgets within limits set by the Department, providing they have sufficient reserves to fund such deficits. For the 2010/11 year, all of the colleges had set deficit budgets.

The Department has received final audited accounts for five of the six further education colleges for the year ended 31 July 2011. These show that all five have stayed within their agreed budgets with three returning a surplus and two achieving deficits lower than originally forecast.

The final accounts for South West College (SWC) have not yet been received and, whilst its draft financial statements identified that it too was on course to achieve a surplus for the year, a technical accounting amendment, which is now required, may result in the College not meeting its budget target.

Universities: Dropout Rates

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) to account for the first year dropout rate from Queen's University and the University of Ulster; (ii) for his assessment of these drop-out rates; and (iii) whether the universities could learn from the pastoral care offered by the Further Education colleges.
(AQW 5486/11-15)

Dr Farry: The most recent Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) figures for full-time first degree entrants, in academic year 2008/9, show that Queen's University had a non-continuation rate of 7.7%, an increase from 7.1% the previous year, and the University of Ulster had a rate of 10%, a decrease from 13.2% the previous year. For the same year, the four Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions averaged 9%, compared to 10.2% the previous year.

Higher Education in Further Education (HE in FE) figures for 2009/10 indicate that 9.7% of students did not continue into the second year of their studies and, for the same year, the non-continuation rate for all students on professional and technical courses in the Northern Ireland Further Education Sector was 13%.

Student retention is a complex and multi-faceted issue, influenced by various personal, social and academic factors. Both Queen's University and the University of Ulster regard the issue of student retention as an institutional priority and closely monitor retention figures. A number of pastoral care initiatives are in place at the universities to address student drop-out rates. The range of support mechanisms include enhanced advice and guidance, improved student engagement and the use of personal tutors. Further Education Colleges have similar pastoral care arrangements which are aimed at promoting the health and wellbeing of students by providing them with access to appropriate guidance and support, personal tutors and counsellors.

In recognition of the increased support requirements of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, my Department pays the two universities around £1.5m per year in the form of a Widening Participation premium to support the recruitment and retention of those students. In addition, my Department, through its widening participation commitment, is considering a number of proposals aimed at improving the retention and completion rates of students. These include; institutions reviewing their approach to teaching, learning and assessment in light of the changing pattern of students' backgrounds and that retention initiatives or interventions should be based on multiple disadvantages and should include an assessment of individual needs.

Job Vacancies

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 5285/11-15, how many job vacancies currently exist.
(AQW 5495/11-15)

Dr Farry: On Thursday 8th December my Department had 1,149 live vacancies, displayed on the Department's job vacancy website JobCentre Online. This equated to 2,054 positions.

The Department uses the term 'vacancy' to describe a single advertisement of one or more positions by an employer and the term 'positions' to describe the actual number of jobs available.

You should note that these figures reflect the vacancies notified to my Department and do not represent the total number of jobs available to jobseekers in Northern Ireland.

Employment: Benefit-age Clients

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 5285/11-15, what strategies his Department will use to assist benefit age clients to get into employment.
(AQW 5496/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department is currently developing a strategy for the Employment Service and will publish it early in 2012. Officials are also examining the measures contained within the new "Youth Contract" announced by the Deputy Prime Minister on 29 November and I hope to be in a position to bring forward similar proposals for Northern Ireland. My ability to add new services and programmes to those already available will depend on the resources made available by the Executive.

In the meantime the full range of existing services and programmes remain open to job seekers. This includes:

- The Adviser Service available through our network of 35 Jobs & Benefits Offices and Jobcentres.
- Steps to Work - Our flagship programme to help the adult unemployed.
- Pathways to Work - aimed at assisting those with health conditions or a disability to move (back) into work.
- The Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS) – a community based employment service which complements statutory provision in areas of the highest level of social deprivation.

In addition the Disability Employment Service (DES) is responsible for the delivery of programmes and services to assist people with disabilities to find and/or keep appropriate employment.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, given the drop in Further Education college admissions in England following the scrapping of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), whether he can give an assurance to young people and their families that EMA will not be scrapped or cut.
(AQW 5508/11-15)

Dr Farry: I can confirm that I am committed to the retention of the Education Maintenance Allowance. It is clear, however, that the funding needs to be better targeted. Findings from the review of the Education Maintenance Allowance scheme in Northern Ireland, carried out jointly by my Department and the Department of Education, highlighted that the scheme is not as economically efficient as it could be because a majority of Education Maintenance Allowance students indicated that they would have remained in education even if they had not received Education Maintenance Allowance.

However, in some cases it makes a real difference. I am determined that young people from lower income families, for whom these allowances make that real difference, continue to be assisted to stay in education and training. I would, however, agree with the Employment and Learning Committee's recommendation that the allowances could be better targeted.

I can advise that my Department and the Department of Education recently established a joint project team which is considering options for the future of the Education Maintenance Allowance scheme.

Following approval by myself and my ministerial colleague in the Department of Education, it is intended that options for the future of the Education Maintenance Allowance scheme will be presented to the Executive as soon as practically possible and this will be followed by a public consultation.

Any proposals to change the current provision of the Education Maintenance Allowance scheme in Northern Ireland will also be subject to the appropriate equality considerations.

Queen's University Belfast: Medical Research

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what funding his Department provides to Queen's University, Belfast for the purposes of medical research.
(AQW 5583/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department allocates the majority of research funding to the higher education institutions by reference to quality, as assessed by their performance in the most recent (2008) Research Assessment Exercise. Funding allocated to Queen's

University, Belfast, for medicine and related subjects, totalled £10,308,073 in the current academic year (2011/2012) and is paid as part of the university's overall block grant. However, Queen's University, Belfast, as an autonomous body, is free to distribute this funding according to its own strategic priorities.

Queen's University Belfast: Medical Research

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether Queen's University, Belfast uses animals for medical research.
(AQW 5584/11-15)

Dr Farry: Animals are used within Queen's University for medically related research. All this work complies with the requirements of the Animal (Scientific Procedures Act), 1986, as enforced by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety Inspector.

Queen's University Belfast: Medical Research

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what type of medical research is carried out by Queen's University, Belfast.
(AQW 5585/11-15)

Dr Farry: Medical research in Queen's University, Belfast employs the full spectrum of approaches, from molecular and genetic studies through to epidemiological research and full clinical trials of new therapies. Clinical research areas include: cancer; diabetic complications; cardiovascular disease; respiratory disease; renal disease; ophthalmic disease; infectious diseases; and the role of the immune system in health and disease.

Certificate of Religious Education

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many Stranmillis University College students have travelled to Glasgow to sit the Catholic Certificate of Religious Education in each of the last thirteen years; and how much this has cost.
(AQW 5592/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Certificate of Religious Education course at the University of Glasgow is delivered through distance learning. There is no requirement for students to travel to the university.

STEM Subjects

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether his Department considers Agri-Food related courses as STEM area subjects; and, if not, will he take steps to ensure that they are classed as STEM subjects, so that students are encouraged to apply for such courses and can access STEM bursaries.
(AQW 5604/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department does consider Agri-Food related courses to be STEM subjects.

Employment Law

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the findings of the survey by the CBI and McGrigors that 50 percent of businesses are discouraged by current employment laws from taking on new staff.
(AQW 5605/11-15)

Dr Farry: The CBI/McGrigors survey merits careful consideration.

There is clearly an appetite for the current employment law regime to be re-examined. This survey is timely given the recent announcements about the UK Government's plans to conduct an Employment Law Review, which covers many of the issues raised in this report.

I have already asked my officials to initiate a similar review of employment legislation here in Northern Ireland. This review will take account of the findings of the CBI/McGrigors report and GB developments but, ultimately, will look to solutions that balance the needs of our local economy and the rights of individual employees.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why young people who are involved with Include Youth's 'Give and Take Scheme' do not qualify for the Education Maintenance Allowance.
(AQW 5618/11-15)

Dr Farry: It is important to clarify that there is a means-tested and a non-means tested Education Maintenance Allowance which have very different target audiences.

The non means-tested Education Maintenance Allowance is payable only under the provisions of the Employment and Training Act (Northern Ireland) 1950 and, as such, to unwaged trainees on the Training for Success Programme (including Programme Led Apprenticeships). When put in place, it formed part of a package of financial incentives directed at young people undertaking specifically structured training of a minimum of 30 hours per week and leading to recognised professional and technical

qualifications. The legislative basis on which the package is provided is intertwined with United Kingdom wide Social Security and Child Benefit legislation and cannot apply to a programme such as the Give and Take scheme or to other pre-vocational training not provided by my Department under the Act.

The means-tested Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) scheme was jointly introduced in September 2004 by my Department and the Department of Education. The main purpose of the scheme is to enable young people from lower income backgrounds to remain in post-compulsory education at school or college with the express purpose of raising participation, retention and achievement rates in the eligible group; and addressing the well-established link between low attainment and low income. In order to be eligible to receive the means-tested Education maintenance allowance, students must, amongst other criteria, be aged between 16 to 19 years and studying full-time at school or a minimum of 15 hours at a Further Education college in Northern Ireland.

Following the recent review of the means-tested scheme, my Department and the Department of Education are currently considering options for its future. It is intended that options will be presented to the Executive as soon as practically possible and this will be followed by a public consultation. I must stress, however, that these options will be based on findings from the review in relation to the scheme as it currently operates. It will not, therefore, be feasible or appropriate, either as part of or outwith the consultation, to consider widening the eligibility criteria of the means-tested allowance to schemes such as Give and Take, which are targeted at students aged 16 to 21 not in Education, Employment or Training and have entirely different objectives.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans his Department has to entitle young people participating in Include Youth's 'Give and Take Scheme' to the Education Maintenance Allowance.
(AQW 5622/11-15)

Dr Farry: It is important to clarify that there is a means-tested and a non-means tested Education Maintenance Allowance which have very different target audiences.

The non means-tested Education Maintenance Allowance is payable only under the provisions of the Employment and Training Act (Northern Ireland) 1950 and, as such, to unwaged trainees on the Training for Success Programme (including Programme Led Apprenticeships). When put in place, it formed part of a package of financial incentives directed at young people undertaking specifically structured training of a minimum of 30 hours per week and leading to recognised professional and technical qualifications. The legislative basis on which the package is provided is intertwined with United Kingdom wide Social Security and Child Benefit legislation and cannot apply to a programme such as the Give and Take scheme or to other pre-vocational training not provided by my Department under the Act.

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Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what consideration his Department has given to allowing young people taking part in Include Youth's 'Give and Take Scheme' to receive the Education Maintenance Allowance.
(AQW 5625/11-15)

Dr Farry: It is important to clarify that there is a means-tested and a non-means tested Education Maintenance Allowance which have very different target audiences.

The non means-tested Education Maintenance Allowance is payable only under the provisions of the Employment and Training Act (Northern Ireland) 1950 and, as such, to unwaged trainees on the Training for Success Programme (including Programme Led Apprenticeships). When put in place, it formed part of a package of financial incentives directed at young people undertaking specifically structured training of a minimum of 30 hours per week and leading to recognised professional and technical qualifications. The legislative basis on which the package is provided is intertwined with United Kingdom wide Social Security and Child Benefit legislation and cannot apply to a programme such as the Give and Take scheme or to other pre-vocational training not provided by my Department under the Act.

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Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) why young people taking part in the 'Give and Take Scheme' are not entitled to the Education Maintenance Allowance; and (ii) to what financial help they are entitled.
(AQW 5629/11-15)

Dr Farry:

(i) It is important to clarify that there is a means-tested and a non-means tested Education Maintenance Allowance which have very different target audiences.

The non means-tested Education Maintenance Allowance is payable only under the provisions of the Employment and Training Act (Northern Ireland) 1950 and, as such, to unwaged trainees on the Training for Success Programme (including Programme Led Apprenticeships). When put in place, it formed part of a package of financial incentives directed at young people undertaking specifically structured training of a minimum of 30 hours per week and leading to recognised professional and technical qualifications. The legislative basis on which the package is provided is intertwined with United Kingdom wide Social Security and Child Benefit legislation and cannot apply to a programme such as the Give and Take scheme or to other pre-vocational training not provided by my Department under the Act.

The means-tested Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) scheme was jointly introduced in September 2004 by my Department and the Department of Education. The main purpose of the scheme is to enable young people from lower income backgrounds to remain in post-compulsory education at school or college with the express purpose of raising participation, retention and achievement rates in the eligible group; and addressing the well-established link between low attainment and low income. In order to be eligible to receive the means-tested Education maintenance allowance, students must, amongst other criteria, be aged between 16 to 19 years and studying full-time at school or a minimum of 15 hours at a Further Education college in Northern Ireland.

Following the recent review of the means-tested scheme, my Department and the Department of Education are currently considering options for its future. It is intended that options will be presented to the Executive as soon as practically possible and this will be followed by a public consultation. I must stress, however, that these options will be based on findings from the review in relation to the scheme as it currently operates and will also take account of the very difficult budgetary position currently facing my Department. It will not, therefore, be feasible or appropriate, either as part of or outwith the consultation, to consider widening the eligibility criteria of the means-tested allowance to schemes such as Give and Take, which are targeted at students aged 16 to 21 not in Education, Employment or Training and have entirely different objectives.

(ii) My Department does not provide funding for individual participants on the Give and Take scheme. Programme funding for the scheme is, however, provided. European Social Funding and Departmental matched funding of £1,720,346 (£1,058,675 and £661,671 respectively) has been made available for the period 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2014. This funding accounts for around 65% of project costs. Include Youth, which manages the Give and Take scheme, provides its own match funding (35% of project costs).

Stranmillis University College and Queen's University Belfast: Proposed Merger

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, given that the negotiations on the merger of Stranmillis University College, Belfast and Queen's University, Belfast have been suspended, whether the roles and the salaries of the two merger co-ordinators have been suspended; and, if not, why not.
(AQW 5646/11-15)

Dr Farry: Work in relation to the proposed merger of Stranmillis University College with Queen's University is ongoing, as is the work of the associated project groups. The roles and the salaries of the merger co-ordinators is a matter for the College's Governing Body.

DEL: Employment Service

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people in each constituency the Employment Service has helped to find work in each of the last five years, broken down by (i) age; and (ii) gender; and how many of these people are still in employment.
(AQW 5656/11-15)

Dr Farry: This information has been placed in the Assembly Library and on my department's website: http://www.delni.gov.uk.

University of Ulster: Relocation of History Courses

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what discussions he had with the University of Ulster on the relocation of history courses from the Magee campus to the Coleraine campus.
(AQW 5673/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have had no discussions with the University of Ulster regarding the relocation of its History course provision to the Coleraine campus. Northern Ireland's universities and university colleges are independent, autonomous institutions, responsible for their own policies and procedures, including course location.

My officials contacted the University of Ulster and it has stated that, in order to achieve operational efficiencies, it is eradicating the duplication of course provision between campuses, except where current provision is of such a scale to warrant duplication. The University has also said that current students will not be affected by the changes and all students will be able to complete their course at their current registered campus.

The University has also said that, by 2014/15, it aims to increase the overall number of full-time places at its Magee campus for Northern Ireland and European Union students by 344 places.

I trust you find this helpful.

Certificate of Religious Education

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning from which budget is funding sourced to pay for students from Stranmillis University College, Belfast to obtain the Catholic Certificate of Religious Education in Glasgow.
(AQW 5706/11-15)

Dr Farry: Funding to enable students from Stranmillis University College, Belfast to obtain the Certificate in Religious Education is sourced from the same budget as the rest of the College's recurrent grant. It is additional funding to the recurrent grant.

Steps to Work

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of (i) carers; (ii) people with a physical disability; and (iii) people with a diagnosed mental illness who have been mandated to undertake the Steps to Work programme in the last 12 months.
(AQW 5763/11-15)

Dr Farry: Only unemployed jobseekers who have been claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and are available for and actively seeking work, are mandated to undertake the Steps to Work (StW) programme after a specified period in receipt of JSA.

(i) The Department does not maintain statistics on the number of carers who were mandated to undertake StW.

(ii) & (iii) It is not possible to disaggregate the numbers on StW with a diagnosed mental illness from those with a physical disability.

During the period 1 October 2010 to 30 September 2011, the latest period for which validated statistics are available, 1,451 JSA claimants with a self- assessed disability were mandated to undertake the StW programme.

DEL: Employment Service Referrals

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of people who have been referred to his Department for support in preparing for work as a result of Incapacity Benefit reassessments.
(AQW 5816/11-15)

Dr Farry: As at 13 December, 2,666 claimants have been referred to my Department's Employment Service for work focused support as a result of Incapacity Benefit reassessments.

DEL: Capital Budgets

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline his Department's capital budget for each of the next three financial years.
(AQW 5839/11-15)

Dr Farry: As published in the Budget 2011-15 document the capital budget allocation for the Department for Employment and Learning for each of the next three financial years is:

	12-13 £m	13-14 £m	14-15 £m
Capital Expenditure (net)	32.3	18.5	28.3

Apart from a small allocation which will mainly be used to fund IT within the Department, this budget has been allocated to the Further and Higher Education sectors as follows:

	12-13 £m	13-14 £m	14-15 £m
Further Education	20.3	2.0	4.0
Higher Education	11.5	15.0	23.0
Department	0.5	1.5	1.3
Total Capital	**32.3**	**18.5**	**28.3**

Stranmillis University College and Queen's University Belfast: Proposed Merger

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what is the cost to date of the proposed merger of Stranmillis University College, Belfast and Queen's University, Belfast; and who is meeting this expenditure.
(AQW 5842/11-15)

Dr Farry: To date, costs of £4,066 have been incurred and met by my Department in relation to the proposed merger. Queen's University Belfast and Stranmillis University College have advised me that they have incurred, and met, costs of £154,568 and £178,620 respectively. The costs incurred total £337,254.

Employment Legislation

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 5228/11-15, to detail why he considers that St Mary's University College, Belfast is complying with all employment legislation when he said during Question Time on 22 November 2011 that the religious 'balance of the workforce is something I have concern about'; and will he review the submitted returns to investigate whether enough was being done throughout the years to address the workforce imbalance.
(AQW 5845/11-15)

Dr Farry: I believe that St. Mary's is complying with employment legislation but an imbalance in the workforce can still result. The review of submitted returns is a matter for another statutory body, in this case the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

Stranmillis University College and Queen's University Belfast: Proposed Merger

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in relation to the proposed merger of Queen's University, Belfast and Stranmillis University College, Belfast, (i) on what basis were the two members of Stranmillis staff retained by the Governing body after their retirement; (ii) what were their subsequent job titles; (iii) how much each one was paid; and (iv) for how long they have been in these specific posts.
(AQW 5910/11-15)

Dr Farry: This is purely an employment matter which is the responsibility of the Governing Body of the College. My Department holds no information in relation to this.

English for Speakers of Other Languages

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he will include English for Speakers of Other Languages as an essential skill which would allow migrants, whose first language is not English, to access essential skills courses in Further Education colleges.
(AQW 5945/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department has no plans to include English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) as an essential skill.

I recognise that ESOL provision is important to the local economy and in promoting social cohesion. Consequently, the highest level of weighted funding will continue to be applied to ESOL courses provided in further education colleges. There is no cap on ESOL provision and the funding incentive has led to increased uptake and delivery in recent years. For example, in the 2010/11 academic year, over £2.4m was drawn down by FE colleges in respect of 4,204 enrolments on ESOL provision. An exercise carried out in November 2011 with the FE colleges confirmed that ESOL demand is being met, with only one college, the South Eastern Regional College, reporting a waiting list. Provision is timetabled across a range of locations during the day, evening and, in some cases, at weekends.

Líofa 2015

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) whether any requests have been made; or (ii) whether there are any plans to use further education colleges or any other facilities controlled by his Department to deliver Líofa 2015.
(AQW 5979/11-15)

Dr Farry: In October 2011, following discussions with the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure, I wrote to the six Further Education colleges, and asked them to consider contributing to the Líofa initiative.

Four colleges – Belfast Metropolitan College, South West College, South Eastern Regional College, and Southern Regional College have recently decided to list their mainstream Irish language provision on the Líofa website.

DEL: Provision of Integrated Services for Children and Young People

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what work his Department has carried out, in conjunction with the Department of Education, in relation to the provision of integrated services for children and young people.
(AQW 5980/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department's (DEL) work with the Department of Education (DE) is wide ranging and includes many key areas.

The DE led Transitions Inter-Departmental Working Group considered how children with Statements of Special Educational Needs (SEN) could better realise their potential in school and progress their after school goals through further education, training, work or day care.

The two Departments are currently working together to implement their respective policies and programmes for 14 to 19 year olds in a coherent and effective way. Both Departments recognise the need to develop a highly skilled, flexible and innovative workforce that will contribute to the twin goals of economic success and social inclusion. As part of this, they have worked together to enhance the profile of vocational education under the Entitlement Framework, which guarantees equality of access for all young people at Key Stage 4 to a broad, balanced and more economically relevant curriculum with clear progression pathways.

The means-tested Education Maintenance Allowance was jointly introduced in 2004 by DEL and DE. Following a recent review of the scheme, DEL and DE have established a joint project team which is considering options for its future in order to better target the allowance at those in most need.

DEL and DE launched the joint Careers Strategy, "Preparing for Success", which aims to develop effective career decision makers in order to increase and support appropriate participation in education, training and employment.

My Department is currently leading on the development and implementation of a new Northern Ireland Regional Integrated Strategy to Widen Participation in Higher Education and is being supported in this work by a range of stakeholders, including DE.

Finally, my Department is leading on the development of a new strategy in relation to those who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs) and in this regard DE is one of our key partners.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether there is any financial support available for people who receive Jobseeker's Allowance and are applying for jobs which require Access NI checks.
(AQW 6030/11-15)

Dr Farry: Financial support is available for people on Jobseeker's Allowance, who are applying for jobs requiring AccessNI checks, through my Department's Adviser Discretion Fund. This fund facilitates the purchase of goods or services essential in assisting an unemployed person to apply for a job, or accept a job offer. If an unemployed person requires financial support to pay for an AccessNI check, he or she should make an appointment with an Employment Service Adviser in the local Jobs and Benefits office or JobCentre so that eligibility for funding can be determined.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Internal Market in Gas

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) for her assessment of the Common Arrangements for Gas proposal; (ii) whether work is continuing on the project and by whom; and (iii) whether her Department or the Utility Regulator has control over the project.
(AQW 2162/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Harmonising wholesale gas transmission networks in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland will allow them to be operated and regulated as a common system, set within United Kingdom and regional development of the European Union's Internal Market in Gas. It will remove cross border barriers to transmission and trading, bring operational efficiencies and promote competition, and enhance investment confidence in developing strategic gas storage in the Larne basin. This will improve security of supply and network resilience to gas emergencies.

The Regulatory Authorities in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are managing the project, working with the system operators and industry. There are technical consultations underway and the Department is preparing legislation to underpin the arrangements. The project is monitored by a Joint Steering Group from the Departments and Regulators.

DETI: October Monitoring Round

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail any financial pressures that have been identified by her Department as part of the October Monitoring Round.
(AQW 3213/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As part of October monitoring, a pressure of £4.7m was identified in Tourism Ireland Limited for dedicated marketing campaigns covering NI2012 and golf, and a pressure of £3.0m was identified in the Northern Ireland Tourist Board for additional work on the surrounding public realm and buildings to Titanic Belfast.

Departments have delegated authority to meet de minimis pressures (i.e. amounts under £1m) from de minimis reductions. A number of de minimis pressures which, taken together, totalled £1.5m were addressed in October monitoring.

Carbon Emission Reduction Target Scheme

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 2617/11-15, in light of the number of electricity suppliers operating, whether he will consider introducing the Carbon Emission Reduction Target Scheme.
(AQW 3285/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Great Britain Carbon Emission Reduction Scheme is due to end in December 2012. The Department of Energy and Climate Change is in the process of developing new energy efficiency measures for GB including the Green Deal and the Energy Company Obligation to replace it. These schemes will not extend to Northern Ireland.

My Department is currently carrying out a study into options for increasing energy efficiency activities in Northern Ireland, including the possible introduction of an energy supplier obligation for Northern Ireland. The outcomes of the study will form the basis of a public consultation in 2012.

One Plan

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, with regard to Ilex Urban Regeneration Company's One Plan for Derry regeneration programme, to detail (i) the funds from her current budget that have been committed to projects under this programme; (ii) the projects that are being funded; and (iii) the start dates for these projects.
(AQW 4139/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

Title of Project	Funds from Current Budget (2011/15) Committed to Project	Start Date for Project
City Centre Pontoon – infrastructure required to support Clipper event identified as a key milestone in Q1 2012/13.	£736,080[2]	The project has commenced. It is anticipated that installation of the Pontoon will occur in late Spring 2012.
Growing the Digital Economy	Nil - To be determined[3]	Project start dates will be determined by ILEX, who will advise Invest NI in advance.
Accelerating growth of Tourism & Culture economy.	Nil - To be determined[2]	Project start dates will be determined by ILEX, who will advise Invest NI in advance.
Establish a Co-operative and Social Enterprise Hub	Nil - To be determined[2]	Project start dates will be determined by ILEX, who will advise Invest NI in advance.
Eco City – A transition to Green Energy	Nil - To be determined[2]	Project start dates will be determined by ILEX, who will advise Invest NI in advance.
Maritime Museum, Ebrington	Funding allocated for 2013/14. Amount to be confirmed Estimated costs £6.6million	Awaiting funding package before start date can be announced

Title of Project	Funds from Current Budget (2011/15) Committed to Project	Start Date for Project
Built Heritage Programme		
Guildhall	£2.4million	January 2012
Aras Colmcille Project	£500,000	January 2012
Apprentice Boys Memorial Hall	£800,000	January 2012
Lighting Strategy	£1.4million	December 2011
City of Culture Programme 2013	£700,000	January 2013

2. The project application was submitted to the EU Interreg Programme and costed in Euros. The Sterling equivalent presented is based on the Whitehall Exchange Rate for November 2011: £1 = 1.1453 Euro.

3. These projects are at development stage and it is not possible to indicate the projected levels of Invest NI contribution.

Jobs: Fermanagh

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many jobs have been created in Fermanagh in the last twelve months; and how many people came off benefits as a result.
(AQW 4553/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Care should be taken to avoid establishing fixed relationships between job creation and unemployment within a particular geographical area. For example, a new job in Fermanagh could be filled by someone from Fermanagh who was on Job Seekers Allowance – but it could also be filled by someone already in employment elsewhere, someone from outside Fermanagh, a recent school leaver or someone currently economically inactive. As a result we do not have statistics on those who move from the claimant count register into a newly created job. However, I have enclosed statistics on the overall picture on Jobs and Unemployment within the Fermanagh area.

In terms of jobs, the following table sets out the increase in employee jobs in the Fermanagh District Council Area between September 2009 and 2010. In comparison Northern Ireland experienced a 0.5% decline in employee jobs over the same period.

Change in Number of Employee Jobs in Fermanagh District Council

	Sept 2009	Sept 2010	Change	% Change
Fermanagh DC	20,972	21,172	+ 200	+ 1.0

Source: DFP, NI Business Register and Employment Survey 2010

Note: Figures exclude Agriculture but include animal husbandry service activities and hunting, trapping and game propagation.

In terms of promoting jobs, Invest NI secured £7.4 million of investment, supporting 112 jobs, in the Fermanagh DCA between 1 October 2009 and 30 September 2011. In addition, over the same period, Invest NI also supported 160 new, locally-owned, jobs indirectly through its Enterprise Development Programme.

In terms of benefits, the number of people on Job Seekers Allowance is recorded in the claimant count statistics. Between September 2009 and 2010 the number of claimants in the Fermanagh DCA increased by 131. Between September 2010 and 2011, the number of claimants increased by a further 109 to reach a total of 1,933 people.

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) whether hydraulic fracturing has ever taken place in Northern Ireland; and if so, (ii) to outline when and where this occurred; (iii) whether the Department of the Environment undertook an environmental impact assessment in each case; and (iv) to detail the planning application reference number in each case.
(AQW 5407/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

(i) Yes;

(ii) Hydraulic fracturing took place in three 'tight gas sandstone' exploration wells in Fermanagh in 2002:

- Slisgarrow No. 2 [202567m E 351853m N] Fractured January 2002.
- Knock Beg No. 1 [206259m E 348955m N] Fractured January 2002.
- Mullanawinna No. 1 [203351m E 342228m N] Fractured February 2002.

(iii) No.

(iv) Not applicable.

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 1695/11-15, whether her Department has granted consent or given permission for hydraulic fracturing to take place; and if so, to detail when and where hydraulic fracturing took place.
(AQW 5411/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I refer the Member to the Answer I gave to Question 5407.

Energy Prices

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the announcements that she and her colleague, the Minister for Social Development, have made since the Assembly debate on Energy Prices on 26 September 2011, when she said 'Minister McCausland and I hope to make some announcements in the next couple of weeks in connection with some ways in which we can help to mitigate price rises and help those who are most in need'.
(AQW 5421/11-15)

Mrs Foster: On Monday, 3 October, the Minister for Social Development and I launched a new sustainable energy campaign aimed at encouraging consumers to become more aware of ways to reduce energy use and thereby reduce energy costs. This campaign was developed by the Sustainable Energy Inter-Departmental Working Group (SEIDWG).

This sustainable energy campaign is branded under the name 'Energy Wise' and has involved television advertising, billboards and a dedicated online presence at www.nidirect.gov.uk/energywise.

This initial campaign will run until February 2012 providing energy saving advice and information on energy efficiency. Given the current challenging financial climate impacting on every household and business in Northern Ireland there is a need for increased awareness on how energy use can be controlled and reduced.

More recently, I have made clear my desire for the development of a more diverse, sustainable and competitive energy market in Northern Ireland. This has been demonstrated by my intention to extend the natural gas network, increase levels of renewable heat and electricity and attract further investment in renewable energy, highlighted by the recent DONG Energy investment.

In addition, my colleague, the Minister for Social Development has made announcements on an innovative 'pay-as-you-go' mechanism for oil customers, as well as committing to provide double glazing and appropriate thermal installation for all Housing Executive properties (a further 50,000 homes).

Finally, the member will also be aware of the recent announcement, made by the First Minister and deputy First Minister, to provide additional winter fuel allowance payments for more than 250,000 people.

All these actions demonstrate the importance that my Department, and the Executive as a whole, gives to supporting those in the most need against increased energy costs.

Tourism: Angling

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much money her Department, or its agencies, has invested in marketing Northern Ireland as an angling destination, in each of the last five years; and the estimated spend during this period by tourists visiting to participate in angling activities.
(AQW 5422/11-15)

Mrs Foster: No angling-specific marketing is undertaken by either the Northern Ireland Tourist Board or Tourism Ireland and I am therefore unable to break down actual spend on marketing Northern Ireland as an angling destination. However, angling events are promoted on www.discovernorthernireland.com and www.discoverireland.com where links are available to access up to date information related to angling.

The estimated spend in each of the last five years by direct* GB and overseas visitors who participated in angling during their stay in Northern Ireland was as follows:

Year	Spend (£m)
2010	6.1†
2009	3.6
2008	6.2
2007	6.2
2006	5.1

Source: Northern Ireland Passenger Survey

* These figures relate only to 'direct' GB and overseas visitors, i.e. those who exited via a Northern Ireland air or sea port and stayed at least one night in Northern Ireland. They exclude GB and overseas visitors who stayed at least one night in Northern Ireland but exited via a port in the Republic of Ireland ('via ROI' visitors).

† 2010 figures cannot directly be compared with 2006-2009 figures due to changes in survey methodology.

Drilling for Oil and Gas

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) whether any form or type of drilling has taken place under the four active petroleum licences; (ii) to provide details of any form of drilling that has taken place for which her Department issued consent; (iii) whether, prior to her Department issuing consent to drill, an environmental impact assessment was conducted; (iv) when her Department issued consent for drilling to take place; and (v) whether, under the current licences, any form of boring or drilling is permitted without (a) planning permission; (b) an environmental impact assessment; and (c) consent from the Health and Safety Executive.
(AQW 5423/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

(i) No.

(ii) Not applicable.

(iii) Not applicable.

(iv) Not applicable.

(v) Under the current licences some forms of drilling may be permitted without

a Planning Permission or;

b An Environmental Impact Assessment

where these drilling operations do not exceed certain thresholds with respect of site area and duration. All drilling for minerals or petroleum must be notified to Planning Service so that they can make a determination on this.

c Drilling a borehole is subject to the Borehole Sites and Operations Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995. Companies are not required to obtain consent, but must notify HSENI 21 days in advance of the commencement of operations and comply with drilling specific and general health and safety regulations.

Growth Loan Fund

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the rationale behind her Department's decision to exclude businesses in the agri-food sector from the Growth Loan Fund, given that the sector is demonstrating growth at present.
(AQW 5424/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Processors or manufacturers in the agri-food sector will be eligible to apply to the Growth Loan Fund provided they satisfy the SME criterion.

The primary production of agricultural products is not eligible as this sector lies under the remit of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development ("DARD").

Unemployment

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 4142/11-15, why her Department does not produce projections for future rates of unemployment.
(AQW 5425/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Credible economic forecasts will be those which are produced independently and those which, through the test of time, gain a track record in terms of reliability or accuracy.

As mentioned in my response to AQW 4142/11-15 my department does not produce forecasts for unemployment. This is in line with the practice in Whitehall where, to avoid criticism of economic and fiscal forecasts being influenced by politicians, the UK Government established the independent Office for Budget Responsibility. If estimates were produced by DETI these would generate similar issues around perceived independence.

It is worth noting that our unemployment rate, based upon the internationally comparable Labour Force Survey, contains a significant sampling error of +/- 1.3 percentage points around the current unemployment rate of 7.3%. This range is significantly greater than for the UK as a whole, where the sampling error is only +/- 0.3 percentage points due to the larger scale of the survey. Therefore any projection would have a very wide range to work within, leaving it of little practical use as a reliable predictor of the rate of unemployment.

Nevertheless, there are external economic forecasters who provide their own projections of future rates of unemployment, and other economic forecasts, for Northern Ireland.

Drilling for Oil and Gas

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) when, and where exploratory drilling for oil and gas has taken place in Northern Ireland in each of the last 12 years; (ii) whether, prior to drilling (a) planning permission was sought; (b) an environmental impact assessment was conducted; and (c) her Department conducted a habitats assessment.
(AQW 5428/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

(i) The following drilling for oil and gas has taken place in each of the last 12 years:

2000	Cairncastle No. 1	(Ballytober, Co. Antrim)
2001	Knock Beg No. 1	(Knock Beg, Co. Fermanagh)
2001	Mullanawinna No. 1	(Greaghnagleragh, Co. Fermanagh)
2001	Slisgarrow No. 2	(Conagher, Co. Fermanagh)
2001	Wind Farm No. 1	(Skeahogue, Co. Fermanagh)
2008	Ballinlea No. 1	(Ballinlea Lower, Co. Antrim)

(ii) Parts (a) & (b) are matters for the Department of the Environment.

(c) No. The wells drilled at Cairncastle and Ballinlea were not close enough to any Natura 2000 sites to trigger a formal habitats assessment at that time. At the time of drilling of the Fermanagh wells in 2001 none of the current Natura 2000 sites had been formally designated.

Tourism Strategy for 2012

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many of the additional 150,000 visitors highlighted in the draft Tourism Strategy for 2012 will be from outside Northern Ireland; and on which countries her Department is focussing to provide the additional visitors.
(AQW 5445/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Tourism Ireland's targets will see Northern Ireland welcome an additional 150,000 visitors in 2012, all from outside Northern Ireland. The Tourism Ireland Marketing Plans for 2012, which I launched on 1 December, include a new advertising campaign with the tagline 'Jump into Northern Ireland' and will be the most extensive programme of marketing activity and campaigns ever undertaken for Northern Ireland.

While the campaign will target 22 markets around the world, the key focus will be on winning market share in our top four markets of Great Britain, the United States, France and Germany.

Fibre-optic Network Ring

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the fibre-optic network ring around Enniskillen.
(AQW 5459/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The fibre-optic ring, delivered by H2O Ireland Limited under the Northern Ireland Broadband Fund was completed in November 2010 and is now fully-operational and ready for customer orders.

Northern Ireland: Visitor Numbers and Spend

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how she plans to maximise shopper footfall in Northern Ireland following the planned VAT increase in the Republic of Ireland.
(AQW 5475/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board's (NITB) remit is to promote the whole of Northern Ireland to both the domestic and Republic of Ireland markets, with a view to increasing visitor numbers and spend. Each year, NITB undertakes a series of seasonal marketing campaigns in both markets. These award winning campaigns, have successfully driven both domestic and Republic of Ireland visitor numbers and spend over recent years.

The NITB's media strategy has always been to capitalise on market conditions. The recent increase in VAT within the Republic of Ireland market, provides an opportunity to exploit the cross border shopping audience. Our media plans for our 2012 campaigns, target the key geographical border counties catchment area, with radio and press advertising.

The creative message within the campaign, is always bespoke to the audience and highlights low price accommodation deals and the proximity of Northern Ireland.

In addition to the press and radio platforms, there will also be geo-targeted outdoor advertising on key arterial traffic routes and shopping centre locations in the Republic of Ireland border counties.

Tamboran Resources

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) how many meetings her Department has had with Tamboran Resources over the last three years; (ii) who was present at these meetings; and (iii) to outline the agenda of each meeting.
(AQW 5509/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

(i) Officials from my Department have met representatives of Tamboran Resources on seven occasions over the last three years.

(ii) & (iii) The dates of the meetings, attendees and agenda outlines are listed below:

14/15 July 2010 Availability of existing exploration data

Attendees:
Director, Geological Survey of Northern Ireland (GSNI)
Tamboran representative
Tamboran representative

27 July 2010 Availability of existing exploration data

GSNI representative
Tamboran representative

24 September 2010 Licence Application Interview

Interview panel
DETI, Chair
British Geological Survey representative
Department of Energy & Climate Change representative
GSNI representative
GSNI representative
Tamboran representative
Tamboran representative

12 November 2010 Availability of existing exploration reports and rock samples

GSNI representative
Tamboran representative

15 March 2011 Introduction of Tamboran Chairman; discussion of exploration programme. Director, GSNI

DGSNI representative
Chairman, Tamboran
Tamboran representative
Tamboran representative

7 June 2011 Introduction of new Tamboran CEO; environmental protection and use of chemicals; public awareness; outline drilling methodology; royalties.

Director, GSNI
GSNI representative
DETI representative
CEO, Tamboran
SLR Consulting Ltd. representative

1 August 2011 Meeting with NI regulators on shale gas exploration & development, abstraction, discharge and impoundment licensing, planning permission, pre-drilling monitoring programme, well construction, fracturing operations and green completions

Director, GSNI
GSNI representative
DETI representative
Officials from DARD, DOE, NIEA and HSENI
Tamboran representative
Tamboran representative

Broadband

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether a mapping ecercise has been carried out to show the locations of the gaps in fixed line broadband; and, if so, will the findings be made public, and, if not, does she have any plans to commission such an exercise.
(AQW 5518/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Broadband services are delivered using a variety of technologies across Northern Ireland. A preliminary mapping assessment have been made but looking across a range of technology platforms including wire line, radio and mobile broadband technologies. Work is underway to make a more detailed assessment across the range of technology platforms and is expected to be completed in early 2012. There are no plans to publish this information.

Gas Exploration: County Fermanagh

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 4894/11-15, to detail the role she played in selecting the area in west Fermanagh that would be made available for gas exploration.
(AQW 5519/11-15)

Mrs Foster: None.

NI Screen

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many applications for funding NI Screen has received from the West Tyrone constituency in each of the last five years; and how many of these applications were successful.
(AQW 5543/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Screen Commission's current strategy 'Driving Global Growth' 2010 – 2014 is designed to grow and develop Northern Ireland as a production centre for film, television and digital content. It is a progression of its last strategy 'Building on Success' which attracted some of the world's largest production companies including HBO and Universal. KPMG and Oxford Economics during their appraisal of this strategy, described the NI Screen Fund as having performed excellently, with strong additionality and having exceeded its headline targets.

NI Screen's current strategy 'Driving Global Growth' which builds on the achievements of the previous strategy is focused on continuing the growth of the positive productivity impact of the screen industry in Northern Ireland so as to optimise the impact on the local economy and ensure value for money, through a balanced portfolio of investment and the development of the local skills base. My Department through Invest NI has allocated funding of £6.3m for the current year 2011 – 2012 for development of the screen industries.

The following table illustrates the number of funding applications NI Screen received from production companies in the West Tyrone constituency in each of the last five years and the number of these responses that were successful.

	2007		2008		2009		2010		2011	
	Received	Awarded	Received	Awarded	Received	Awarded	Received	Awarded	Received	Awarded
Total Awards	3	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	8	6

Invest NI

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail how InvestNI supported the 8,267 new local business start-ups between 2007/08 and 2009/10.
(AQW 5576/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In the period from 2007/08 to 2009/10 Invest NI supported new local business start-ups through two programmes.

The Start a Business Programme (SABP) was available from 2007 to 31st March 2009. The SABP provided 1:1 assessments: a series of training workshops on business development issues; a financial and business planning workshop; mentoring on ICT issues and post start-up care for those businesses with growth potential. There was also support available to develop a web package.

Additionally each participant on the SABP who completed the programme and started their business on a full time basis was eligible for a grant of £400 with part –time businesses eligible for a £200 grant. The availability of grants was discontinued from the 7th April 2008 and following a further review in February 2009 it was concluded that the grant element had a very low level of additionality and correspondingly low level of Value for Money.

The start up element of the Enterprise Development Programme (EDP) was available from 1st April 2009 to 30th September 2011 and offered a range of provision to improve business capability in the form of bespoke training, mentoring, signposting and referrals. Participants were given advice on finance, marketing, sales and other fundamentals to give their business the best possible chance of success.

Invest NI

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for a breakdown of the £2.6 billion in investment commitments which InvestNI secured between 2008/2009 and 2011/2012 to date.
(AQW 5577/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The table below shows the level of total investment planned by Invest NI clients that had an offer of assistance approved between 1st April 2008 and 30th September 2011, broken down by Parliamentary Constituency Area (PCA) and financial year. This represents the total planned cost of implementing approved projects and includes the financial support offered by Invest NI.

It should be noted that Invest NI does not allocate budgets by geographic areas such as PCAs. The geographic location of projects is determined by those businesses which bring forward projects suitable for Invest NI assistance and are based on their specific requirements.

Invest NI Total Planned Investment by Parliamentary Constituency Area (2008-09 to 30th Sep 2011-12)

	Total Planned Investment (£m)				
PCA	**2008-09**	**2009-10**	**2010-11**	**2011-12**	**Total**
Belfast East	557.01	78.00	148.18	12.72	795.91
Belfast North	33.74	45.46	8.11	28.53	115.84
Belfast South	60.73	107.33	73.10	50.72	291.88
Belfast West	9.70	12.63	1.17	0.72	24.21
East Antrim	19.01	14.73	62.30	6.90	102.94
East Londonderry	9.38	18.06	7.50	1.01	35.95
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	39.74	21.75	25.12	4.72	91.33
Foyle	18.68	68.59	13.17	20.23	120.67
Lagan Valley	9.66	24.12	34.05	12.81	80.63
Mid Ulster	47.57	67.34	22.58	6.26	143.76
Newry And Armagh	89.01	27.35	44.13	4.74	165.23
North Antrim	11.65	20.27	40.46	2.38	74.76
North Down	10.80	10.71	2.90	9.93	34.34
South Antrim	31.47	17.43	74.89	8.20	132.00
South Down	29.44	18.69	8.07	5.15	61.35
Strangford	10.50	18.80	3.73	2.33	35.36
Upper Bann	74.05	78.82	27.71	16.64	197.22
West Tyrone	13.65	21.04	4.04	2.86	41.60
Not Yet Determined	6.03	1.19	36.74	1.88	45.85
Total	**1,081.82**	**672.31**	**637.96**	**198.72**	**2,590.81**

Notes

1 Figures for 2011-12 are provisional and may be subject to amendment.

2 08/09 Figures include the Bombardier C Series project - 836 jobs promoted, £21m assistance, £520m planned investment.

3 The Not Yet Determined category represents data for which this level of detail is not available.

4 Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

Grants: Solar Power Installations

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what grants are available for solar power installations in homes or business.
(AQW 5586/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has recently consulted on proposals to provide financial support and incentives for those wishing to install renewable heating technologies, including solar thermal panels for hot water. These proposals are not yet finalised and my Department is carrying out further analysis in advance of launching the incentive scheme.

There are no grants for the production of electricity from solar photovoltaic panels. This technology is incentivised through the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation which provides a revenue stream for the electricity generated.

Gas: Network Expansion

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how (i) Government; (ii) consumers; and (iii) industry would contribute to the funding that is required to extend the natural gas network.
(AQW 5598/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Following my Department's recent consultation on the potential for extending the natural gas network, I am currently considering the best way forward, including how any new gas infrastructure could be financed. In general, new gas infrastructure would be funded initially by the company licensed to develop the network, with costs recovered from consumers over a defined licence period in agreement with the Utility Regulator. If Government were to fund part of the cost of new gas infrastructure, this would reduce the impact on consumer bills.

Gas: Investment

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of whether the return on investment in gas can be accurately reflected given the risks of a regulated market.
(AQW 5600/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Investment in new energy infrastructure is recovered from consumers over a period agreed by the licensed developer and the Utility Regulator. The company therefore receives a regulated return on their investment as part of their licence to develop new gas infrastructure, with the rate of return reflecting the overall risk associated with the project.

Gas: Network Expansion

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, at current prices, how much the expansion of the gas network is expected to save (i) existing gas customers; and (ii) customers availing of natural gas for the first time.
(AQW 5601/11-15)

Mrs Foster: It is estimated that extending the natural gas network to the six towns in the West and North West which were identified in my Department's 2010 feasibility study, i.e. Dungannon, Cookstown, Magherafelt, Omagh, Enniskillen/Derrylin and Strabane, would result in a small increase in retail bills for all existing gas and electricity consumers. However, it is also anticipated that consumers switching to natural gas from other fuels, such as home heating oil, would see a reduction in their energy costs.

Gas: Network Expansion

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the impact the expansion of the gas network will have on reliance on home heating oil.
(AQW 5602/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Expansion of the natural gas network in Northern Ireland should result in more energy consumers switching to gas, thus reducing reliance on home heating oil which is a more polluting and, based on current prices, more expensive fuel.

Home Heating Costs

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much, on average, it costs to heat a home with (i) home heating oil; (ii) natural gas; and (iii) renewable sources of energy.
(AQW 5603/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Based on an example of annual energy usage of 16,500kWh for household heating, costs to heat a home in the Greater Belfast licensed area by natural gas would be in the range of £733 to £815, depending on the individual supplier and before any discounts from certain payment methods are applied. Based on 500 litres of heating oil costing around £300, home heating oil costs are estimated be in the region of £990 for similar household energy usage. All costs include VAT.

Given the diverse range of renewable energy technologies available and their variation in costs, the Department is unable to provide an up to date comparison of costs for renewable energy sources against current natural gas and heating oil prices.

Tamboran Resources

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail all the permissions her Department has issued to Tamboran in relation to the drilling of boreholes.
(AQW 5636/11-15)

Mrs Foster: No such permissions have been issued.

Unemployment

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline her target for the reduction in unemployment levels by the end of the Programme for Government period.
(AQW 5638/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department does not have a target for reduction in unemployment levels by the end of the Programme for Government (PfG) period. However, one of the key indicators of success of the NI Economic Strategy will be an increase in the proportion of the working age population in employment.

This is not a DETI target but the collective responsibility of the whole Executive.

In the PfG period, DETI has a commitment to promote 25,000 new jobs. These jobs will come from a variety of sources including Foreign Direct Investment, supporting locally owned companies & new start-up businesses and through the Jobs Fund.

Home Heating Oil Market: Regulation

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given that there are areas which are serviced by only one oil delivery company, and that around 70 percent of home heating oil is imported by one company, for her assessment of whether there is sufficient competition in the home heating oil market to justify not regulating the industry.
(AQW 5639/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have no plans to extend the powers of the independent regulator to cover home heating oil. The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) report on its review of competitiveness in the United Kingdom energy market found that genuine competition exists in Northern Ireland's domestic heating oil market, which was clearly working well for consumers. Each Northern Ireland post code area is serviced by no less than 10 heating oil distributors who can buy from stocks held in 4 local fuel terminals, which are owned by competing oil importers.

The OFT did not see any justification for price regulation across the UK on competition grounds and reported that retail and wholesale heating oil prices in recent years had been lower in Northern Ireland than other parts of the UK, due partly to high volumes sold through a large number of local distributors. Regulation would not guarantee lower consumer prices, as any associated costs will likely be passed on to customers.

Banks: Lending

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department can take to encourage banks to lend to struggling businesses.
(AQW 5647/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The availability of finance at reasonable terms is a very important issue in Northern Ireland and is crucial for our economic recovery. This is reflected in the draft Economic Strategy which is currently out for public consultation and we have recently met with the main banks in Northern Ireland to emphasise the importance of supporting business development and growth.

These discussions have included encouraging banks to promote, where appropriate, the Enterprise Finance Guarantee Scheme and also stressing the importance of communicating clearly to business customers in relation to lending decisions.

DETI, through Invest NI, continues to develop and implement an Access to Capital Strategy which supports the availability of capital within the local SME market. An important element of the strategy is the establishment of a £50m Growth Loan Fund which will help small and medium sized businesses with growth ambitions. It will provide loans of between £50,000 and £500,000 to viable companies with growth plans and will be managed on a fully commercial basis.

The Finance Minister has also been working with both the UK and Irish Governments and the local banks to try to ensure that finance is available to businesses. In particular, he has been pressing the banks to ensure that the British Bankers' Association (BBA) Business Finance Taskforce report recommendations are implemented locally.

Progress in this regard was announced at a regional Better Business Finance event in Belfast on 17th November 2011, including establishing an independent appeal process and the finance that is being made available through the Business Growth Fund.

While lending has been falling in Northern Ireland, data provided by the BBA suggests that 9 of 10 loan applications are being approved.

The Finance Minister met with Sir Mervyn King, Governor of the Bank of England, on 16th November 2011 to discuss the measures that are being taken nationally to improve the stability and liquidity of the banking sector and the mechanisms that might be put in place to ensure the benefits of these steps are felt here in Northern Ireland.

In the Autumn Statement, the Chancellor has announced up to £21 billion of interventions, known as credit easing, to ease the flow of credit to businesses that do not have ready access to capital markets. Both I and the Finance Minister welcome any steps the Government are taking to improve access to finance and we are currently determining how they will be applied in Northern Ireland.

Gas: Network Expansion

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what priority has been given to extending the gas network to the ten towns area and the outlying villages.
(AQW 5684/11-15)

Mrs Foster: firmus energy currently has the exclusive rights to develop gas distribution networks and supply natural gas to consumers in their 'Ten Towns' area outside Greater Belfast in line with the conditions, established by the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, in the company's gas conveyance and supply licences.

To date, natural gas networks have been installed in Londonderry, Limavady, Coleraine, Ballymena, Ballymoney, Antrim, Craigavon, Banbridge, Armagh, and Newry. firmus energy has connected around 11,000 properties in these towns to date, and is continuing with roll-out of the natural gas network within these and other towns in their licence area such as Tandragee, Warrenpoint and Ballyclare. During 2010, firmus energy further extended its gas network towards Cullybackey village and to Portstewart.

Electricity: Household Energy Audits

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she will consider the combination of an energy audit for each household as part of any future smart metre installation scheme.
(AQW 5689/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The combination of an energy audit for each household as part of any future smart meter installation scheme has not been included in the development of a cost benefit analysis for smart metering in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland Electricity, as network owner, is responsible for installing meters and if they were to undertake an energy audit at the time of installation, these costs would need to be recovered from consumers.

An energy audit does not necessarily need to be linked with a smart meter installation and in any case free household energy audits are already available from both energy suppliers and independent energy organisations.

Broadband Fund

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the findings of any evaluations into projects that are funded by her Department under the Broadband Fund.
(AQW 5708/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The main findings in respect of the technology trials undertaken by Avanti Communications and supported under the Broadband Fund have previously been provided in response to AQW 5343/11-15.

Of the remaining projects the following are the key findings:

- The Broadband Fund has helped companies delivering the projects to make the commercial model for further investment in rural networks;
- Supported projects have accelerated delivery of a range of high-speed broadband services in remote and rural prioritised areas;
- Broadband Fund has provided a strong strategic fit with Project Kelvin, with one of the network operators, North West Electronics now passing on higher bandwidth, lower cost fixed wireless services through a backhaul agreement on the Kelvin network;
- Localised support for bids and post-delivery marketing of services can ensure sustainability of solutions;
- Access to public sector infrastructure, where available, can help improve the business model for investment and offer revenue-sharing opportunities

Broadband Enhancement Scheme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what types of businesses qualify for the Broadband Enhancement Scheme.
(AQW 5709/11-15)

Mrs Foster: DETI does not run any scheme called the Broadband Enhancement Scheme.

Broadband Enhancement Scheme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether agricultural businesses qualify for the Broadband Enhancement Scheme.
(AQW 5710/11-15)

Mrs Foster: DETI does not run any scheme called the Broadband Enhancement Scheme.

Geothermal Energy

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what she is doing to make the establishment of geothermal energy plants viable.
(AQW 5716/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department is committed to developing all forms of renewable energy in line with targets set in the Strategic Energy Framework of 10% renewable heat and 40% renewable electricity by 2020. Deep geothermal energy is already eligible for incentives in the form of Renewable Obligation Certificates for renewable electricity generation. In addition, my Department is considering how renewable heat from deep geothermal resource could be incentivised and had a call for evidence as part of the recent public consultation on the Northern Ireland Renewable Heat Incentive.

In addition, the Geological Survey is a partner in the IRETHERM project, a programme of research into the deep geothermal energy resources in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; this is funded by Science Foundation Ireland and runs from 2011-15. This project will evaluate the deep geothermal potential of the sedimentary basins and granites of Northern Ireland using innovative modelling techniques and will build on the results from previous research commissioned under the Innovation Fund.

Geothermal Energy

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she is taking to ensure that the areas, such as Ballymena, that have been identified for basing a geothermal energy facility will not be disadvantaged because of the availability of the gas network in the area.
(AQW 5717/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am aware of the significant potential geothermal energy resource that Northern Ireland has and therefore my Department recently sought evidence from stakeholders on how best this sector could be developed and incentivised.

This call for evidence was part of the consultation of the Northern Ireland Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI); my Department is now carrying out further analysis on this policy following the consultation process. In the initial proposals a deep geothermal energy project would be eligible for 0.9 p/kwh, this level of support was not dependent on the location of the project or the availability of gas, therefore there is no difference in support to a geothermal project in a 'gas area' than one in a 'non-gas area'. As part of the ongoing analysis work an assessment will be taken on the appropriate level of support for deep geothermal.

The introduction of the renewable heat market and the extension of the natural gas network are two complementary policies that will support the development of a more sustainable, secure, diverse and competitive heat market.

Foreign Direct Investment

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much Foreign Direct Investment has been secured for 2011/12; and how this compares to the previous three years.
(AQW 5751/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The table below shows the amount of inward investment committed through projects approved by Invest NI for an offer of financial support in 2008/09, 2009/10, 2010/11 and 2011/12 to date. The year to date position is represented along with the final outturn for each of the last 3 years.

These projects have been assisted under a number of Invest NI schemes aimed at both employment creation and other business development activities, such as R&D, training, trade activities and technology and process development. This split is also represented in the table.

Invest NI Inward Investment Supported between 1st April 2008 and 30th Nov 2011

	1st April - 30th November			1st April to 31st March		
Fin Year	**Job-Related**	**Business Development**	**Total**	**Job-Related**	**Business Development**	**Total**
2008-09	672.80	24.93	697.72	692.59	42.25	734.84
2009-10	71.35	71.51	142.86	189.01	79.65	268.65
2010-11	148.70	51.90	200.60	235.79	76.46	312.25
2011-12	85.03	32.28	117.30	-	-	-

Notes:

1 2011-12 figures are provisional and may be subject to change.

2 2008-09 figures include the Bombardier C Series project - 836 jobs promoted, £21m assistance, £520m planned investment.

3 Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

The investment represents the expected cost of the projects to externally-owned businesses and includes Invest NI's financial support. It reflects an intention to invest in the future and although the vast majority of projects are implemented, some may not proceed as planned.

In terms of future prospects for inward investment, the pipeline of new projects has reduced from previous years due to the current global economic conditions, which have contributed to flat growth and uncertainty in the market, with companies delaying their international expansion plans.

Invest NI is continuing to push the Northern Ireland proposition in its key markets to ensure that, in the medium to longer term, it is well placed to take advantage of any upturn.

Although the current market remains volatile and further downturns are predicted, Invest NI is still pursuing projects, particularly within the financial services / ICT / software sectors. Invest NI is also considering the pipeline for Knowledge Process Outsourcing (KPO) and contact centre employment and is actively engaging with companies with projects in this business activity through the Jobs Fund programme.

Invest NI continues to investigate new and emerging sectors which present foreign direct investment opportunities for Northern Ireland, such as creative industries, digital media, renewables and professional services.

Drilling for Oil and Gas

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail of any permissions to drill boreholes that her Department has issued to companies holding petroleum licences.
(AQW 5760/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has not issued any permissions for borehole drilling on any of the petroleum licences currently held in Northern Ireland. My Answer to the Member's earlier question AQW5428/11-15 provides details of boreholes for which my Department issued permissions to drill on previously held licences within the last 12 years.

Tamboran

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether rescinding Tamboran's petroleum licence would prevent Tamboran from undertaking hydraulic fracturing in years four and five of the work programme outlined in their licence.
(AQW 5762/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Yes. A company can only carry out petroleum exploration, appraisal or development in Northern Ireland if it holds a valid petroleum licence granted by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. The Petroleum Production Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1987, as amended by The Petroleum Production (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010, set out the circumstances in which the Department may revoke a petroleum licence.

Food Strategy

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment which of the recommendations included in the Agri-Food: A Study for Cross-Border Cooperation report her Department will adopt and implement.
(AQW 5766/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Food Strategy Board may wish to consider the Report as part of its strategy for the long term development of the sector.

Tamboran

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the average size of drill pad that Tamboran plans to use in Fermanagh; (ii) the approximate number of drill pads it will use; (iii) the average number of bore holes in each drill pad; (iv) the average amount of water that will be needed for each drill pad per year; (v) how Tamboran plans to transport, collect and store this amount of water; (vi) the chemicals that Tamboran will use in both the drilling and fracturing process; (vii) where Tamboran plans to store any excess water or fracking fluid that comes back out of the ground; and (viii) whether any part of the fracking zone in Fermanagh has been identified as having a high level of radon gas.
(AQW 5771/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Tamboran Resources are still at an early stage in the development of their plans for submitting an application to drill an exploration borehole to evaluate the shale gas potential of their petroleum licence area. The company have published details of their proposed methodology on their website (www.tamboran.com) but this may be subject to modification in the light of the results from any initial exploration well and fracturing operation that might take place in the future.

Broadband Fund

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the number of broadband connections that have been made by each company that received funding under the Broadband Fund; (ii) the total amount of funding given to each successful applicant; and (iii) the cost to her Department of each connection for each company.
(AQW 5834/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

(i) Prioritised investment areas under the Broadband Fund include those where a range of stakeholders have lobbied my Department for improvement of services and indicated significant consumer demand. My Department's investments are designed to deliver legacy infrastructure that will be exploited over a prolonged period of time. Numbers of broadband connections will change over a period of time and my Department does not maintain information of this nature.

(ii) On each occasion that a call for proposals under the Fund has been completed I have announced publicly the funding made available to successful applicants. Details are set out below:

Call	Applicant	Funding £
1	North West Electronics	£237k
	Avanti Communications	£137K
3	Net 1 Limited	£116k
	North West Electronics	£62K
4	H2O Ireland Limited	£46k
	North West Electronics	£41K
5	BT plc	£250k
6	North West Electronics	£215K

(iii) My Department does not maintain information of this nature.

Energy Companies: Salaries

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department, or the Utility Regulator, has any influence on the determination of pay grades for senior members of staff within energy generation or distribution companies; and if not, whether she has any plans to make influencing powers available.
(AQW 5836/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Since electricity privatisation in 1992 and since the inception of the natural gas industry in the mid-1990s, all energy companies in Northern Ireland have been privately owned. Neither my Department nor the Utility Regulator has any power to set salary scales for private energy companies, nor would it be appropriate to intervene with private companies in this way.

Health and Safety Executive: Enforcement Notices

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many Improvement and Prohibition notices have been issued to each District Council by the Health and Safety Executive in the last five years.
(AQW 5928/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland has issued a total of 23 enforcement notices to Councils in the last five years. The notices are set out in the table below.

Council	Improvement Notice	Prohibition Notice	Total
Ards	1	0	1
Belfast City	1	0	1
Carrickfergus	6	2	8
Coleraine	2	0	2
Craigavon	2	5	7
Fermanagh	2	0	2
Larne	1	0	1
North Down	0	1	1
Total	**15**	**8**	**23***

* The recipient of an enforcement notice may appeal to an Industrial Tribunal within 21 days of service of the notice. Therefore the table does not include notices served which are still within the appeal period.

Department of the Environment

Renewable Energy

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment (i) for his assessment of the Scottish Executive's Planning Policy 6 Renewables; and (ii) whether he would consider having a separation distance for large wind farms on the edge of cities, towns and villages or areas of clustered housing and local communities.
(AQW 3297/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): SPP 6 'Renewable Energy' was superseded in February 2010 by the Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) document. The SPP supports the development of a diverse range of renewable technologies in order to meet climate change and renewable energy targets; increase security and diversity of supply; and support sustainable economic growth.

The SPP recommends that planning authorities should, in preparing development plans, establish a spatial framework for onshore wind farms over 20 megawatts generating capacity. This framework should comprise, areas of search where wind farm proposals are likely to be supported; areas requiring significant protection; and other areas of potential constraint where proposals will be considered on their merits against defined criteria

To assist with formulating this framework, the policy recommends a separation distance of up to 2km between areas of search and the edge of cities, towns and villages. This is not a minimum separation distance and the SPP also states that decisions on individual developments should take account of specific local circumstances and geography.

The current policy for assessing wind energy developments in Northern Ireland is set out in PPS18 'Renewable Energy'. This policy already requires a separation distance of 10 times the length of the rotor diameter to any occupied property, with a minimum distance of not less than 500m

Recycling

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department intends to take to increase recycling in homes.
(AQW 4523/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department has consulted on a new recycling policy for local authority collected municipal waste and I will be considering the outcome of that consultation in the next few weeks to see what further measures can be implemented to increase recycling. I will act quickly

However, under the Rethink Waste Programme, the Department provides a range of incentives to increase levels of recycling. These range from the provision of financial assistance to technical advice.

The Rethink Waste (Capital) Fund helps increase levels of recycling by providing direct funding to local councils to cover the capital costs of improving or extending their existing collection services and infrastructure for reuse and recycling.

Councils, as well as the private and Community & Voluntary sectors, can also apply for funding under the Rethink Waste (Revenue) Fund for revenue funding for initiatives which will boost waste prevention, recycling and re-use activity particularly for household waste.

The Department also provides grant-in-aid funding to the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) to provide technical advisory support to local councils for improving the quality and efficiency of collection and recycling services offered to households.

The Department is working closely with a variety of stakeholders to raise awareness of waste prevention and recycling through the Rethink Waste Campaign. Fully funded Love Food Hate Waste and composting demonstration packages have been offered by the Department to every council in Northern Ireland to assist in reducing waste to landfill through waste prevention, reuse and recycling.

In the last 9 months the Department has worked with stakeholders, primarily local government, to promote themed national weeks relating to home composting, recycling and waste reduction.

The Campaign is underpinned by a national advertising campaign that reinforces the awareness of the "3 Rs – Reduce, Reuse, Recycle" with householders.

Plastic Bags: Landfill Sites

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has any plans to reduce the amount of plastic bags that are polluting landfill sites.
(AQW 4912/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I agree that discarded carrier bags present a significant environmental problem. Resolving this problem is the key driver behind the proposal to introduce a bag levy from 1 April 2013 and to extend the levy to a range of reusable bags.

The levy is an environmental initiative intended to reduce bag consumption significantly and experience elsewhere has shown that introducing a levy can lower bag consumption by up to 90%. A reduction of this scale in Northern Ireland would deliver substantial environmental benefits, including significantly reducing the number of bags ending up in landfill sites.

The Department has recently completed a consultation on proposals for the introduction of the levy. This sought views on issues such as the type of bags to be covered by the new arrangements, the amount of the charge and arrangements for administration, collection and enforcement.

I am currently considering the responses received, before taking a final decision on the way forward. I can however confirm that the levy will cover all single use bags not just plastic bags. This reflects the fact that paper bags and other alternatives can be just as damaging to the environment as plastic bags.

I can also confirm that I intend to bring forward new primary legislation which extends the levy to cover certain types of reusable bags. The rationale for this is to avoid a scenario where consumers use low-priced reusable bags as a replacement for single use bags – and discard them in the same way.

Finally, I can confirm that the Executive has approved my proposal for a phased approach to the implementation of the carrier bag charging arrangements. This entails the initial introduction of a levy on single use bags from April, extending to reusable carrier bags in April 2014.

Shale Gas: Lough Allen Basin

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions he has had with (i) the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment; and (ii) his counterpart in the Republic of Ireland in relation to the environmental impacts of the search for shale gas in the Lough Allen Basin.
(AQW 5042/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My officials in the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) are participating on a working group recently established by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) on the issue of shale gas exploration and fracking. The working group consists of representatives from all government departments and agencies with a potential regulatory role in relation to fracking activities. I have said that current and future developments will be subject to any appropriate environmental assessments.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has also been in contact with the Republic of Ireland's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regarding the fracking proposals in counties Leitrim and Cavan.

It is entirely reasonable to enquire about the impact on the Lough Allen Basin. I have therefore requested officials to in particular, discuss this issue with colleagues is the Republic and provide me with advice by the middle of January 2012.

Slurry Spreading: Closed Period

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of the Environment whether he is aware of any research, historical or on-going, into the effects on the environment of the closed period for slurry spreading.
(AQW 5216/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am aware of a wealth of research into the effects of spreading of organic manures during the months covered by the closed period set out in the Nitrates Action Programme which was introduced to meet Northern Ireland's legal and environmental obligations under the EC Nitrates Directive. A selection of references to just some of the scientific research carried out on the subject is attached at Annex A.

A number of the measures, including a closed period for the land spreading of nitrogen fertiliser, contained in the 2010 NAP Regulations are mandatory under the Nitrates Directive and the requirement within the Directive for closed periods is based on extensive, worldwide, peer-reviewed scientific research.

Closed periods promote best practice to obtain maximum benefit from nutrients in fertilisers for crop growth while protecting the environment. Organic manures, including slurry, are potent sources of nutrients and the purpose of the closed period is to encourage application of organic manures under favourable conditions when the nutrients will be utilised by growing crops and prevent their application to land when the potential for loss of nutrients to both surface waters and groundwater is highest. The scientific evidence confirms that this risk is greatest in autumn and winter. In addition to causing short term pollution problems, nutrient enrichment of surface water contributes to eutrophication which is a widespread problem in Northern Ireland's rivers, lakes and loughs; and a large proportion of this nutrient enrichment is attributable to agriculture. The scientific evidence also shows that, in climatic regions such as Northern Ireland, during November, December and January, crops and grass continue to grow but growth rate is limited by low soil temperatures, short day length and wet soils.

The dates for the closed periods specified within the Northern Ireland action programme are based upon robust local research carried out by highly reputed scientists in the Agri-food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), the University of Ulster and Queen's University. The scientific report of that work, including references to scientific research on the impact of slurry spreading during winter time on the environment, can be viewed at:

http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/darddoe23oct02.pdf

In 2010, the 2006 NAP Regulations, including the measures for the closed period, were reviewed and as part of that review, a scientific working group (consisting of scientists from DARD, AFBI and DOE) produced a report outlining changes in water quality since the introduction of the 2006 NAP Regulations. The results showed that, with the 2006 NAP Regulations having been in place from 1 January 2007 and all measures operational from 1 January 2009:

- nitrate levels in surface freshwaters and groundwater appear to be generally stable;

- long-term trend analysis shows that the monthly trends in average nitrate and phosphorus concentrations in rivers in Northern Ireland are predominantly decreasing or stable;
- there is still evidence of eutrophication in rivers, lakes and marine waters;
- it will take longer for a response to be detected in biological indicators of trophic status and in lakes and marine waters;
- trends in fertiliser use and improved use of manures are very encouraging.

The scientific report produced for the review can be viewed at: http://www.doeni.gov.uk/nap_review_final.pdf

The 2010 consultation document can be viewed at:

http://www.doeni.gov.uk/consultation_nitrates_action_programme_regulations__northern_ireland__2010.pdf

As part of the review, DOE and DARD officials also engaged with the European Commission to discuss proposals for the new action programme. The Commission continues to question whether the current closed period in Northern Ireland is of sufficient length and has raised concerns regarding the application of manures in early October and during February. A research project on manure application during these periods is being carried out at the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute.

In addition, as part of the monitoring and reporting requirements of the Nitrates Directive, the Departments continue to monitor water quality throughout Northern Ireland and the Commission has made it clear that future requests for derogations from the Directive will be assessed against any improvements in water quality.

Annex A

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Wind Turbines

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment (i) to detail the number of planning applications received for single wind turbines in the (a) North Down Borough Council; and (b) Ards Borough Council areas in each of the last five years; and (ii) of these, how many have been approved.
(AQW 5261/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The following applications have been received and decisions issued.

Table 1: Single Turbine applications received for Ards and North Down Local Government Districts, 2006/07 to 2010/11

	Ards	North Down
2006/07	3	2
2007/08	9	2
2008/09	9	1
2009/10	4	2
2010/11	2	5
Total	**27**	**12**

Source: Planning NI

Table 2: Single Turbine application decisions for Ards and North Down Local Government Districts, 2006/07 to 2010/11

	Ards		North Down	
	Approved	Refused	Approved	Refused
2006/07	4	0	1	0
2007/08	6	0	2	0
2008/9	11	1	1	0
2009/10	5	0	2	0
2010/11	2	0	1	0
Total	**28**	**1**	**7**	**0**

Source: Planning NI

Planning is currently engaged in an exercise to cleanse and enhance the quality of historic data held which relates to renewable energy applications. As such the data provided in this document may be subject to later revision.

Cemeteries

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of the Environment what legislation governs the creation of private cemeteries.
(AQW 5389/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Under the provisions of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, the creation of a private cemetery would be regarded as development and, as such, would require permission following the submission of a planning application.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency's Water Management Unit (WMU) is required under the Water Framework Directive to improve or maintain the quality of all our waters, both surface and groundwater. WMU also has a duty to protect surface water and groundwater quality under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 and the Groundwater Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009. It is important to note that these pieces of legislation apply to extensions to existing cemeteries as well as proposed new cemetery developments.

Councils: Outstanding Debt

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the current level of outstanding debt in local government.
(AQW 5552/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Councils, are bodies corporate as defined in the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972, and as such, are independent of the NI Executive and the department, and directly responsible for decisions regarding their own financial affairs.

I am very much aware of the current level of debt and the complexity of managing debts and assets with RPA. I have no indication from the Chief Local Government Auditor that there is any such impropriety in relation to the amount of monies borrowed by councils.

Magherafelt Area Plan

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of the Environment whether the Magherafelt Area Plan is on schedule to be adopted in December 2011.
(AQW 5632/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Magherafelt Area Plan was adopted on schedule on 14 December 2011.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Civil Service: Secondments

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) how many civil servants have been on secondment to the private sector in each of the last three years; and (ii) at what level has the salary of these secondments been recouped.
(AQW 3105/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Over the last three years there has been only one civil servant seconded to the private sector. This secondment of a member of the senior civil service commenced in August 2011.

On occasions, the NICS will recoup salary costs for secondees from the host organisation. The level of recoupment depends on the terms agreed between the civil service and the host organisation. The arrangements currently in place are to recoup 54% of the salary costs of the SCS member who is seconded to the private sector.

Civil Service: Recruitment

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many staff he intends recruiting to the Civil Service in each year of the 2011-15 budget period.
(AQW 3575/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The most recent available estimates from Departments on the numbers of staff required to be recruited to the General Service grades in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (which make up approximately two thirds of the total workforce) are provided in the table overleaf. The figures take account of current vacancies and past trends on how general service staff move through or leave the NICS and are based on information and forecasts which are currently available. The number of staff to be recruited to the Northern Ireland Civil Service is kept under review and estimates are revised as appropriate.

It is not possible to provide figures on the number of staff in non general service grades who may be recruited over the period up to 2015, as this information is not held by Departments.

Estimates of potential external recruitment to the General Service grades

	July 2011 - March 2012	April 2012 - March 2013	April 2013 - March 2014	April 2014 - March 2015	Total
Total	**243**	**670**	**636**	**690**	**2239**

The latest quarterly NICS workforce monitoring figures indicate that there is projected to be an overall net reduction of approximately 1,500 NICS posts over the Budget 2010 period.

Banks: Business Finance

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of the high proportion of businesses that are dependent on banking finance, for his assessment of the optimal number of businesses that should be financed by the banking sector; and what options the Executive has for promoting a more diverse range of business finance.
(AQW 5107/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As you suggest, the banking sector is an important source of finance, particularly for our Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs), and I have been working with both the UK and Irish Governments and the local banks to try and ensure that

credit is available to businesses at reasonable terms. Many businesses also draw on other sources of finance, such as equity funding, however this is often used to complement rather than entirely replace bank lending. Therefore it is not appropriate to talk in terms of the optimal number of businesses financed by the banking sector.

That said, I believe more of our businesses could also avail of alternative sources of finance and DETI, through Invest NI, continues to develop and implement an Access to Capital Strategy which supports the availability of capital within the local SME market. Over the next seven years, and using a combination of public sector funds levering in private sector monies, Invest NI will deliver a range of initiatives that will allow access to capital funds of over £100m. This offers a continuum of funding from £50k to £2m available for investment or lending to companies. The initiatives will include a seed and early stage fund of approx £12m, a co-Investment fund of £16m, a development fund of £30m and a growth loan fund of £50m. In particular, the growth loan fund will provide loans, primarily unsecured in nature, of between £50,000 and £500,000 to viable businesses in the manufacturing or tradable services sectors.

A UK Business Growth Fund has also been established following a recommendation by the Business Finance Taskforce in this regard and this is also open to businesses in Northern Ireland. It became operational in April 2011 and the total amount of equity available is £2.5 billion. The financing opportunities offered by this fund were highlighted at the Better Business Finance event which I attended in Belfast on 17th November 2011.

Civil Service: Secondments

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number of Civil Servants, in each Department, who have been seconded to the private sector in each of the last three years; (ii) the length of the secondment in each case; and (iii) in how many cases there has been a short-fall in salary.
(AQW 5213/11-15)

Mr Wilson: In the last 3 years one civil servant has been seconded to the private sector. The secondment commenced in August 2011 and is still in place. The host organisation is reimbursing the NICS at a rate of 54% of the secondee's salary.

Public Sector: Salaries

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail all posts in the public sector where the annual salary is over £100,000.
(AQW 5489/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The information requested is not readily available and can only be compiled at disproportionate cost.

Public and Private Sector Salaries

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what percentage of the workforce, in the private and public sectors, currently earn over £100,000 per annum.
(AQW 5490/11-15)

Mr Wilson: At April 2011, the percentage of the Northern Ireland public sector workforce earning over £100,000 per annum was estimated to be 0.3%. In the Northern Ireland private sector, the comparable percentage at April 2011 was 0.4%.

Public Sector: Salaries

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the wage gap between the average public sector worker and the highest earning public sector worker; and how this figure compares to each of the last 10 years.
(AQW 5491/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The information required to detail the wage gap between the average public sector worker and the highest earning public sector worker over the last ten years is not readily available and could only be compiled at disproportionate cost. However, the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) can be used to compare estimated full-time median public sector earnings with the 99th percentile earnings figure. The 99th percentile is the figure above which 1% of employees had higher earnings in the public sector for 2002-2011. These estimates are provided in the attached table.

Year	Public Sector Median	99th Percentile
2002	£22,768	£64,169
2003	£23,053	£62,416
2004ex	£24,253	£77,302
2004	£24,280	£77,302
2005	£24,596	£79,837
2006inc	£25,262	x

Year	Public Sector Median	99th Percentile
2006	£25,019	£75,837
2007	£25,208	£75,793
2008	£25,621	£67,468
2009	£27,237	£80,902
2010	£27,365	x
2011	£28,720	£86,390

Please note that these estimates are from a sample survey and are accordingly subject to an associated degree of sampling error.

x = Statistically unreliable at the 90th percentile.

Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings

Pleural Plaques

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the process for ex-public sector workers with Pleural Plaques to apply for compensation under the new Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.
(AQW 5608/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The aim of the Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 is to ensure that a claim in negligence arising from certain asymptomatic asbestos-related conditions is not ruled out as a result of a decision of the House of Lords in 2007. Accordingly, the Act provides that those conditions are to constitute actionable damage for the purpose of a claim for damages for personal injuries. However, the Act does not provide for an automatic payment of damages, nor does it introduce new procedural rules for the handling of claims. Each claimant will, therefore, have to pursue his or her own claim and must seek his or her own legal advice, which will take account of his or her circumstances.

Civil Servants and Public Sector Workers: Foyle Constituency

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of (i) civil servants; and (ii) public sector workers who live in the Foyle constituency and currently work in Belfast, broken down by (a) Department or organisation; (b) full-time posts; and (c) part-time posts.
(AQW 5617/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The table overleaf sets out the NI Civil Service position in accordance with the most recently published data at 1 January 2011. For the purposes of this AQ, Belfast has been defined as the four Belfast Parliamentary Constituencies. It is not possible to provide information in relation to public sector workers, as details of home addresses are not held.

NICS STAFF WORKING IN THE FOUR BELFAST PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES WITH A HOME ADDRESS IN THE FOYLE CONSTITUENCY AT 1 JANUARY 2011

Department	Total
DARD	5
DEL	10
DFP	22
DHSSPS	3
DOE	9
DRD	3
DSD	42
*OTHER	4
Total	**98**

Full Time	Part-Time/Job Share	Total
90	8	98

Notes

* "Other" category includes staff in other Departments whose numbers are too small to publish individually. Departmental numbers have been grouped to protect individual confidentiality.
Data sourced from HRConnect @ 1st Jan 2011.
Data provided for all NICS staff with Home and Work Location data recorded.
Data excludes Casual Staff and Staff on Career Break.
Data includes secondees out of the NICS, if any, shown against their parent department.
Excludes uniformed NI Prison Service Staff

Tendering Process: Pre-qualification Questionnaires

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what consideration he has given to changing the tendering process so that Pre-Qualification Questionnaires (PQQ) are no longer required for contracts below a set, reasonable value, and that the cost of PQQs is no longer a financial burden on the competing companies going through the tendering process.
(AQW 5642/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Prequalification is a normal feature of the tendering process for construction contracts. It provides government construction clients with the assurance that only competent contractors are invited to tender and, by shortlisting applicants, it reduces the costs to industry as a whole by limiting the number of contractors who are put to the considerable expense of submitting a tender.

The prequalification questionnaire should be proportionate to the scale and complexity of the contract. Nevertheless, I recognise that it can be a burden on individual contractors and on Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) in particular.

In recognition of this, Central Procurement Directorate (CPD), in common with the CoPEs, already uses a simplified procurement process for procurements under £30,000 which does not require submission of a PQQ. However this is not appropriate for contracts valued over £30,000, which are required to be publically advertised.

In light of this, my officials in CPD are actively engaged with industry representatives in the development of simplified prequalification processes that could be used in relation to lower value construction related contracts, which are not subject to the detailed requirements of EU procurement regulations.

I expect the discussions with industry to bear fruit early in the New Year.

CPD Supplies and services contracts below the EU threshold do not use PQQs.

Procurement Contracts

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether Departments are delivering best value for money for procurement contracts.
(AQW 5671/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Departments are subject to NI procurement policy as approved by the Executive. The core ethos of the policy is the delivery of best value for money and it is the responsibility of Departments, working with Centres of Procurement Expertise (CoPEs) to ensure that this is achieved.

In the last 3 years (2008-2011), for example, savings recorded by CPD (on behalf of Departments) amounted to £71.6m.

Procurement Policy requires Departments and CoPEs to follow best practice procurement which satisfies the 12 guiding principles including competitive supply and compliance with Procurement legislation. Adherence with these principles is key to ensuring that best value for money is achieved.

The Procurement Board's Strategic Plan for 2011 – 2014 includes a key objective for "delivering Best Value for Money in a challenging economic climate". Progress towards the targets underpinning this objective will be monitored by the Procurement Board on a regular basis.

Public Sector: Salaries

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people on the public payroll earn (i) between £95,000 and £139,999; and (ii) more than £140,000 per annum.
(AQW 5720/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The information requested is not readily available and can only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Vacant Properties

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many vacant properties there are in each council area.
(AQW 5740/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The number of vacant properties in each District Council area as at 11th December 2011 are listed in the attached table.

District Council	Number of Vacant Properties
Antrim	1,135
Ards	2,250
Armagh	2,126
Ballymena	1,453
Ballymoney	782
Banbridge	1,505
Belfast	11,972
Carrickfergus	844
Castlereagh	1,173
Coleraine	2,499
Cookstown	1,407
Craigavon	2,838
Derry	2,343
Down	2,364
Dungannon and South Tyrone	2,669
Fermanagh	3,346
Larne	958
Limavady	1,113
Lisburn	2,717
Magherafelt	1,264
Moyle	715
Newry and Mourne	3,623
Newtownabbey	1,388
North Down	1,707
Omagh	2,536
Strabane	1,244
Northern Ireland Total	**57,971**

Invoices: Prompt Payment by Departments

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what arrangements are in place to ensure the prompt payment of invoices by Government bodies for services provided by local businesses.
(AQW 5741/11-15)

Mr Wilson: In November 2008 a letter was issued to all Accounting Officers asking for their support in meeting the UK wide commitment to pay suppliers for agreed invoices within 10 days. Since then, Account NI, the NICS financial shared services centre, has suspended the application of normal payment terms, which were typically 30 days, meaning that where payments are otherwise ready for issue they will be released for payment within the 10 day target.

Account NI has taken steps to minimise invoice processing times, with invoices being paid once they have been fully authorised and quality assured by departmental officials and educating suppliers where invoices are being held and identified as 'in dispute'.

In addition to a range of services provided by Account NI to help suppliers ensure the prompt payment of their invoices Account NI publishes monthly statistics on the prompt payment performance. http://www.accountni.dfpni.gov.uk/index/working-with-suppliers/faqs-3.htm

Invoices: Late Payment by Departments

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the position on the payment of extra fees faced by Government bodies as a result of the late payment of invoices.
(AQW 5742/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The NICS is committed to the Better Payments Practice Code, as set out in Annex 4.6 of Managing Public Money, and is subject to the Late Payment of Commercial Debt Regulations 2002. These regulations provide a statutory right for suppliers to claim interest on late payments of commercial debt. Payment is regarded as late if it is made outside the agreed terms, or 30 days after receipt of a valid invoice where no terms are agreed.

Any expenditure incurred as a result of such claims should be treated as exceptional and must be noted in the organisation's resource accounts.

Budget Expenditure Lines

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why budge texpenditure lines are not broken down sufficiently to give transparency, and meaningful information, on actual spending allocations within each Department, particularly in relation to the high spending Departments such as the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of Education.
(AQW 5793/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Terms of Reference for the Review of the Financial Process in Northern Ireland, agreed by the previous Executive on 10 February 2011, has the ultimate aim of a transparent financial framework of Budgets, Estimates and Accounts that will enhance scrutiny and accountability.

In the Discussion Paper issued in October on the Review, the issue of transparency of departmental expenditure plans was addressed. Recommendation 6 makes the initial proposal that spending areas in departmental expenditure plans should be re-structured in such a way as to be meaningful and informative to the reader and indicative of the range of services delivered by each Department.

Officials are currently assessing the responses to the Review, including this issue, and I will bring a Report, with final recommendations, to the Executive in the new year. I plan to report the outcome of the Review to the Assembly in the Spring of 2012.

Meanwhile, I would point out that the majority of spend by the Departments of Education and Health & Social Services flows via arms length bodies such as the Education and Library Boards or the Health and Social Care Trusts - the expenditure of these Bodies is published in detail in their annual accounts and laid in the Assembly each year.

Invoices: Payment by Departments

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the change in meeting the targets set for the payment of invoices in each of the last three years.
(AQW 5865/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Department of Finance and Personnel, through its shared service centre, Account NI, is involved in the processing of invoices on behalf of Departments. Performance for the last three years is as follows:

Year	% Paid in 30 Calendar Days	% Paid in 10 Working Days
2009/10	84	57
2010/11	93	79
2011/12 (to date)	96	88

The most recent figures, for November 2011, are 99% and 90% respectively.

Departments migrated to Account NI between 2007 and 2009. The Department of Justice will join in 2012. The figures represent all invoices processed through Account NI in the relevant period.

Unless otherwise stated in a contract, the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act sets a target of paying invoices within 30 calendar days of their presentation, or within the date of receipt of services, whichever is later.

Additionally, in November 2008, the then DFP Minister announced that Northern Ireland Civil Service Departments should aim to pay valid invoices within 10 working days.

Civil Service: Absenteeism

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what measures are being pursued to reduce the levels of absenteeism in the Civil Service.
(AQW 5947/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Managing attendance remains a key priority within the Civil Service and there are a comprehensive range of policies and procedures in place to address the problem. Help and support for staff at work and throughout their illness is available, including professional interventions, assistance with rehabilitation and reasonable adjustments. The revised inefficiency sickness absence policy focuses on areas such as return to work interviews, warning action and a new process for managing long term sick absence.

Prevention of illness and promotion of healthy lifestyles are integral to the overall approach adopted by the NICS in managing attendance. There have been a number of new strategies and approaches developed or trialled over the past year.. For example, a central web-based health and wellbeing hub, known as NICS WELL, will be accessible to all staff in early 2012, a new training programme to equip managers to deal more effectively with sickness absence is being designed and a new approach to rehabilitation using the Welfare Support Service is being piloted.

Rates: Domestic Rating of Properties

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has any plans to revalue the domestic rating of properties.
(AQW 5987/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I have no plans to revalue domestic properties in the near future. I believe that now would not be an appropriate time to begin a domestic general revaluation given the unsettled state of the housing market.

As you will be aware I cancelled the non-domestic general revaluation in light of the continued economic downturn and instability in the property market. The market evidence for a new Valuation List was both inadequate and inconsistent. If the general revaluation had proceeded it would have fallen well short of international valuation standards. The same issues are relevant to the domestic sector, while there is also an overriding need to maintain stability for the tax base.

In terms of annual rate increases the regional rate was cut in real terms for the last three years. For this year and the next three years it will be frozen in real terms. This means that rate bills are lower than they otherwise would have been. District rates are of course outside the control of the Executive.

At present the domestic rating system is based on individual capital values that were assessed using a fixed valuation date for all properties of 1 January 2005. This fixed date ensures that all properties are valued on a consistent basis, with subsequent fluctuations in market prices (both up and down) disregarded until the next general revaluation. Any properties built post 1 January 2005 continue to be valued at 1 January 2005 levels.

A general revaluation would be required to update the property values on which rates are based simply involves a redistribution of the rating burden, it does not in itself change the total amount of money that needs to be raised to pay for essential public services and a general revaluation is always accompanied by a corresponding change in the tax rate (the rate in the pound).

So, if a general revaluation were to occur at this time only those properties that have reduced in value by more than the average would experience a reduction in rates liability, while properties experiencing lower than average falls in value would have an increased rates liability. There would be both winners and losers.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Prisons: Agency Medical Staff

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of agency medical staff that have been used in each prison in (i) 2009; (ii) 2010; and (iii) 2011 to date; and the cost of using these staff in each year.
(AQW 5537/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The information is set out below

	No. of agency medical staff	Prison establishment	Cost (£ 000)
9/10	0	N/A	0
10/11	2	HMP Maghaberry	41
11/12	1	Across all 3 prison establishments	72

CT Scanning

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the usage and activity of the CT scanners in the (i) Altnagelvin Area Hospital; (ii) Tyrone County Hospital; and (iii) Erne Hospital.
(AQW 5544/11-15)

Mr Poots: Over the last three years (2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11), the CT scanners in both the Tyrone County Hospital and the Erne Hospital were in operation for 37.5 hours per week, with further 24 hour emergency cover at the Erne Hospital.

During 2008/09, the Altnagelvin Area Hospital CT scanner was also in operation for 37.5 hours per week, with 24 hour emergency cover. In 2009/10 and 2010/11, the scanner was in operation for 48 hours per week, with 24 hour emergency cover.

Table 1 shows the number of CT scans that were carried out at each of these hospitals during 2008/09 and 2009/10. Due to changes to the system used to administer CT scans at the Western HSC Trust which were implemented in early 2010/11, I am advised that the a count of the number of CT scans undertaken between 01/12/10 and 30/11/11 provides the most robust indication of CT activity at each of these hospitals within the last year.

Table 1: Number of CT scans carried out at the Altnagelvin Area, Tyrone County and Erne hospitals

	Year		
Hospital	**2008/09**	**2009/10**	**01/12/10 to 30/11/11[1]**
Altnagelvin Area	6,879	7,206	9,360
Tyrone County	5,184	5,899	4,571
Erne	4,998	5,496	4,463

Source: Western HSC Trust

1 A change in recording methodology during 2010/11 means that data from this time onwards may not be directly comparable with data for previous years.

CT Scanning

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many CT scans have been carried out at the (i) Altnagelvin Area Hospital; (ii) Tyrone County Hospital; and (iii) Erne Hospital in each of the last three years.
(AQW 5545/11-15)

Mr Poots: Over the last three years (2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11), the CT scanners in both the Tyrone County Hospital and the Erne Hospital were in operation for 37.5 hours per week, with further 24 hour emergency cover at the Erne Hospital.

During 2008/09, the Altnagelvin Area Hospital CT scanner was also in operation for 37.5 hours per week, with 24 hour emergency cover. In 2009/10 and 2010/11, the scanner was in operation for 48 hours per week, with 24 hour emergency cover.

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Source: Western HSC Trust

1 A change in recording methodology during 2010/11 means that data from this time onwards may not be directly comparable with data for previous years.

CT Scanning

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the new local enhanced hospital in Omagh will continue to provide a CT service.
(AQW 5546/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Western Health and Social Care Trust have confirmed that a CT scanning service is part of the planned service model for the new enhanced Omagh hospital.

Beech Hall Centre

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the services that are available in the Beech Hall Health and Well Being Centre, Belfast.
(AQW 5567/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust that the following services are available at Beech Hall Health and Wellbeing Centre:

Services provided by Allied Health Professionals – Occupational Therapy; Physiotherapy; Podiatry; Speech and Language Therapy.

Community Health and Nursing Services – Dentistry; Community Paediatrics Nursing; District Nursing; Health Visiting; Family Planning; Midwifery; School Nursing.

Social Work Services – Older People; Family and Child Care.

The Trust has also provided a purpose built day centre, integral to the Health and Wellbeing Centre, which provides therapeutic and rehabilitation services for people with physical disabilities.

Suicide and Self-harm

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on his Department's strategy to deal with suicide and self-harm.
(AQW 5574/11-15)

Mr Poots: The "Protect Life" strategy is currently being refreshed in light of findings from a review of international evidence and best practice, a review of progress on Protect Life actions, learning from local research, evaluation of component parts of the strategy, and feedback from a major community sector and health and social care workshop held in September. The "refreshed" strategy will be published in early 2012. It will contain a number of revised objectives and actions, and will indicate where additional focus is required in addressing suicide and self harm.

In addition, an independent evaluation of Protect Life has been commissioned and will take place during 2012. The outcome of the evaluation will inform future suicide and self-harm prevention policy in Northern Ireland.

Clinical Psychologists

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of (i) new cases; (ii) visits on continuing cases; and (iii) out-of-hours visits undertaken by clinical psychologists in the (a) Western; and (b) Southern Health and Social Care Trust areas in each of the last five years.
(AQW 5588/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the number of (i) new cases; (ii) visits on continuing cases; and (iii) out-of-hours visits undertaken by clinical psychologists in the (a) Western; and (b) Southern Health and Social Care Trust areas in each of the last five years is not available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Causeway Hospital: Dermatology Department

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 5192/11-15, how long patients, who are referred routinely without suspected skin cancer, have to wait for an appointment at the Dermatology Department at the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine.
(AQW 5593/11-15)

Mr Poots: The waiting time position for a first outpatient appointment in the Dermatology specialty at the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine, at 8th December 2011, excluding patients referred with suspected skin cancer (red flag referrals), is outlined in the table below.

Specialty	Patients Waiting for a First Outpatient Appointment, by Weeks Waiting, at Causeway Hospital						Total Waiting
	0-6	>6-9	>9-13	>13-21	>21-26	>26	
Dermatology	100	52	37	108	54	182	533

Source: Northern Health and Social Care Trust

Causeway Hospital: Waiting Times

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 5192/11-15, how waiting times at the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine compare with waiting times at other hospitals.
(AQW 5597/11-15)

Mr Poots: To request this information at hospital level would incur disproportionate cost, given the scale of Dermatology services across Northern Ireland. Therefore, information is provided by Health and Social Care Trust.

The median waiting time for a first outpatient appointment with a consultant at the Dermatology Department at the Causeway Hospital, Coleraine, at 30th September 2011 was greater than 13 weeks, but waiting no longer than 21 weeks.

The median waiting time for a first outpatient appointment in the Dermatology specialty for HSC Trusts, at the same point in time, is shown in the table below.

HSC Trust	Median Waiting Time at 30th September 2011
Belfast	Greater than 13 weeks but waiting no longer than 21 weeks
Northern	Greater than 26 weeks
South Eastern	Greater than 9 weeks but waiting no longer than 13 weeks
Southern	Greater than 9 weeks but waiting no longer than 13 weeks
Western	Waiting no longer than 6 weeks
Northern Ireland	Greater than 13 weeks but waiting no longer than 21 weeks

Source: Departmental Return CH3

Dental Decay: Teenagers

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department will take to address the level of dental decay among teenagers, given that Northern Ireland has the highest level in Europe.
(AQW 5616/11-15)

Mr Poots: Northern Ireland teenagers do not have the highest level of dental decay in Europe.

My Department has been very proactive in introducing evidence-based programmes to improve the oral health of children in Northern Ireland.

Since 2004, we have introduced the following measures:

- Fluoride toothpaste schemes
- Fissure sealant scheme
- Enhanced capitation payments for dentists providing care to children from deprived areas
- Focussing the work of the Community Dental Service on high priority areas such as providing care for children from socially disadvantaged area and evidence-based oral health improvement programmes.

Since the implementation of these schemes, we have noticed a significant improvement in the oral health of our child population.

We have noted a reduction in extractions under general anaesthetic from 40,000 in 2004 to 26,500 last year. We have also recorded a large reduction in the number of fillings carried out in children under 18 over this period.

In addition, my Department is supporting a large research trial to investigate the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of using fluoride varnish and fluoride toothpaste to prevent decay in young children.

We will continue to use these evidence-based programmes to further improve the oral health of our child population.

Invoices: Payment by Health and Social Care Trusts

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the target time for the payment of invoices to small businesses by each Health and Social Care Trust; (ii) whether he is aware of any delays in meeting these targets; and (iii) what action has been taken to ensure that delays do not occur.
(AQW 5640/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(1) To comply with the Late Payment of Commercial Debts Regulations 2002, public sector organisations, including Trusts, are required to pay invoices within agreed terms or, if no terms have been agreed, within 30 days of the receipt of goods or a valid invoice (whichever is later). This is the requirement for paying invoices to all businesses, not just small businesses. There is a best practice target of ensuring that 95% of invoices are paid within these terms.

In addition, DFP has issued guidance asking that as many payments as possible be made within 10 days. The Department and all its bodies are aware of this commitment and make every effort to comply with this additional target.

(2) The percentage of invoices paid by the Trusts within the 30-day target for 2010/11 and year to date 2011/12 is summarised in the following table:

% of invoices paid within 30 day target or other agreed terms

	2010/2011 Final Accounts	**2011/12 Cumulative total to 31 October 2011**
Northern	95.60	94.30
Belfast	89.70	92.40
Western	94.50	96.00
South Eastern	91.90	91.80
NIAS	97.50	96.80
Southern	90.40	89.10
Overall Trust Total	**91.88**	**92.69**

(3) DHSSPS has issued guidance to all of its arms-length bodies advising of the requirement to pay invoices within 30 days or agreed payment terms and prompt payment performance is reported to my Department on a monthly basis.

Trusts have also taken a number of actions to improve performance, including:

(a) Circulating the DHSSPS prompt payment guidance to trust staff;

(b) Monitoring prompt payment performance;

(c) Finance staff providing awareness sessions to other Directorates to ensure proper procedures are adhered in ordering and receiving goods;

(d) Providing clearer instructions to managers and suppliers on where to submit/return invoices;

(e) Implementing measures to facilitate approval of invoices; and

(f) Performing internal audit reviews of trust compliance with the guidance.

Assistant Psychologists

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of assistant psychologists currently working in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area; and whether the Trust has allocated resources to recruit any further assistant psychologists in the next three years.
(AQW 5660/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are currently two whole time equivalent Assistant Psychologists employed within the Western Health and Social Care Trust. The Trust is planning to recruit a 0.6 WTE Assistant Psychologist to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service early 2012.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether people in receipt of the higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance and a motability scheme car are entitled to free public transport, via the Health and Social Care Trusts, to attend hospital appointments.
(AQW 5676/11-15)

Mr Poots: I can advise that the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service's Patient Care Service (PCS) provides pre-booked non-emergency transport for patients attending outpatient appointments and those being discharged from or transferred between hospitals, provided they have been assessed by a medical practitioner as requiring transportation, based on clinical need. This is the only criteria used to assess entitlement and is not affected by any benefits patients may be in receipt of, including Disability Living Allowance.

Mental Heath

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services are available for people with mental illness to self-refer for crisis mental heathcare.
(AQW 5680/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are a variety of ways a person with a mental illness can self-refer when in crisis with the main referral routes being through their GP or local A & E Department. There are also a number of voluntary and community agencies, which provide

advice, support and psychological therapies, and which will signpost people to appropriate statutory mental health services when this is indicated.

Kinship Care

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consideration his Department has given to the benefits of kinship care for children who are unable to live with their parents.
(AQW 5690/11-15)

Mr Poots: Article 18(1)(b) and Schedule 2 to The Children (Northern Ireland) Order (1995), requires Health and Social Care Trusts to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within the Trust's area and to promote the upbringing of children by their families, provided that arrangement is consistent with the requirement to safeguard and promote their welfare. The legislation also requires HSC Trusts to fulfil the requirement by providing services appropriate to the needs of the children involved.

The Care Matters in Northern Ireland strategy, which was endorsed by the Executive in 2009, sets out my Department's vision for placing more children within their family of origin. That vision accords with the views of children and young people, who have indicated that, where they can no longer live with their parents, their preferred option is to be cared for by other family members or close friends. It also accords with studies carried out in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, which have shown that in general such placements give children improved stability.

We are in the process of finalising kinship care standards. The standards will specify the arrangements, services, support and procedures that need to be in place to ensure the unique needs of kinship foster carers and those of the children they foster are met. The Standards will be supported by guidance and training and it is intended that they will be issued for implementation in early 2012.

Finally, the member should note that the numbers of children in kinship foster care in Northern Ireland has increased in recent years.

Hydebank Wood: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Ms Gildernew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) whether the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust; or the Health and Social Care Board is responsible for the (a) provision of; (b) commissioning of; and (c) budget for, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services for 15 -17 year olds in Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre; and (ii) to provide details of the budget from whch this expenditure is met.
(AQW 5696/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust is responsible for the delivery of Mental Health Services in Hydebank. The service is commissioned by the Health and Social Care Board and current funding is of £1.4m per annum.

Hydebank Wood: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Ms Gildernew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the level of funding allocated for the provision of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services for 15 -17 year olds in the Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre in (a) each of the last three years; (b) the current financial year to date; (ii) whether the budget is ring-fenced; and (iii) the actual spend in (a) each of the last three years; and (c) the current financial year.
(AQW 5697/11-15)

Mr Poots: Resources for prison healthcare were transferred from the Northern Ireland Prison Service to the HSC in April 2008. Recognising that mental health services in prisons needed particular attention, my Department and NIO each contributed an additional £225k recurrent to the transferring budget for mental health services, £450k per annum in total. This funding did not identify separately an allocation for 15 to 17 year olds, so it is not possible to answer the Question as asked. The service is commissioned by the Health and Social Care Board and funding now stands at £1.4m per annum. This funding is not ring-fenced.

Hydebank Wood: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Ms Gildernew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services for 15 -17 year olds in Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre that have been commissioned in (i) each of the last three years; and (ii) the current financial year.
(AQW 5698/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are no dedicated Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in Hydebank Wood, although these young people may access the general mental health service commissioned by the HSC Board and delivered by the South Eastern Trust. In some instances young people access services delivered by their local Trust.

Resources for prison health were transferred from the NIPS to HSC in April 2008. However the funding transferred did not include specific funding for CAMHS for 15-18 year olds.

The HSCB/PHA have recently reviewed the need for CAMHS services at Hydebank and proposals for the development of a dedicated service within Hydebank have been accepted in principle, subject to the identification of a funding source.

Hydebank Wood: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Ms Gildernew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Health Trust or Health and Social Care Board (i) paediatric nurses; (ii) forensic paediatric nurses; (iii) paediatric psychiatrists; (iv) forensic paediatric psychiatrists; (v) paediatric psychologists; and (vi) forensic paediatric psychologists are providing Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to 15-17 year olds in Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre; and how many Health Trust or Board staff, in total, provide CAMHS care to 15-17 year olds in Hydebank Wood Offenders Centre.
(AQW 5712/11-15)

Mr Poots: Mental Health Services within Hydebank Wood provide care and treatment to all prisoners, this can include male offenders up to age 24 years and female prisoners or immigrant detainees.

Staff working within Mental Health Services in Hydebank Wood at December 2011

Grade	Headcount
Psychiatrist	1
Staff Grade Doctor in Psychiatry	1
Principal Psychologist/Trainee Forensic Psychologist	2
Psychology Assistants	3
Mental Health Nurse	3
Part-time Occupational Therapist	1
Youth Addiction Counsellor	4
Nurse Support	2

Source: South Eastern HSC Trust

Old School Surgery, Greenisland

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the length of time a patient must wait from requesting to see a doctor at the Old School Surgery, Greenisland until they receive an appointment.
(AQW 5743/11-15)

Mr Poots: This information is not available regarding waiting times for a GP appointment at the practice. I understand the Old School Surgery have taken steps to try and minimise the length of time a patient may have to wait for an appointment with their GP. There are, however, a number of factors which can influence waiting times for appointments, for example if a patient requests to see a specific GP, particularly those GPs who are part-time; or requests an appointment at a specific time or on a specific day.

Fire Safety Audits: Commercial Premises

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of (i) the efficiency and effectiveness of the current system of fire safety audits on commercial premises conducted by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service; and (ii) whether the limited resources employed by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service could be better used by selecting premises strategically, for example, in relation to areas with high levels of public access, or areas where emergency vehicles have restricted access due to streetscape.
(AQW 5748/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am confident that the current system of fire safety audits is effective and reinforces the risk-based approach to fire prevention.

The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) carries out fire risk audits in line with national guidance provided by the Chief Fire Officers' Association. This methodology allows NIFRS to target its resources effectively towards areas of high risk, whilst ensuring that all other types of non-domestic premises are also sampled annually. NIFRS may also carry out an inspection where there has been a fire or a complaint about fire safety on premises.

Centre for Independent Living

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many clients, from each Health and Social Care Trust area, have used the Centre for Independent Living in each of the last five years.
(AQW 5758/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the number of clients who have used the Centre for Independent Living Northern Ireland (CILNI) is not available. However, information on the number of clients using CILNI payroll services in each of the last five years is detailed in Table 1 below for your information. Please note that CILNI has operated across all HSC Trusts areas since 2008 only.

Table 1: Clients using Centre for Independent Living NI Payroll Services1

Year	Number of Clients
2010/11	1,150
2009/10	900
2008/09	550
2007/08	300
2006/07	136

1 Figures provided by CILNI have not been validated by DHSSPS.

Programme for Government: Sexual Violence

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures the Executive is proposing under the Programme for Government to tackle the issue of sexual violence.
(AQW 5759/11-15)

Mr Poots: Under the draft Programme for Government, the Executive undertakes to build a strong and shared community, reducing the incidence and impact of various forms of violence and abuse. My Department jointly leads, in conjunction with the Department of Justice, on the 'Tackling Sexual Violence and Abuse' strategy which is a multi-agency, victim focused strategy, implemented through the delivery of annual action plans.

One of the major achievements of the 'Tackling Sexual Violence and Abuse' strategy will be the opening of a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) in early 2013. This will be a regional facility for all victims of rape and sexual assault (children and adults) and will be jointly funded by my Department and PSNI.

My Department has also undertaken work to reduce waiting times and increase capacity in counselling services for victims of sexual violence and abuse.

A Directory of Services for supporting victims of sexual violence and abuse was produced in March 2010 and made available across Northern Ireland.

Hydebank Wood: Mental Health

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many 15-17 years olds in Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre have been diagnosed with a mental health problem; and what conditions have been diagnosed.
(AQW 5783/11-15)

Mr Poots: Of the juveniles aged between 15 and 17 who are currently resident in Hydebank Wood, 3 have a diagnosis of ADHD.

Hydebank Wood: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many staff are providing Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to 15-17 year olds in Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre; and, of these, how many are (i) paediatric nurses; (ii) paediatric psychiatrists; (iii) forensic paediatric psychiatrists; (iv) paediatric psychologists; and (v) forensic paediatric psychologists.
(AQW 5784/11-15)

Mr Poots: Mental Health Services within Hydebank Wood provide care and treatment to all prisoners; this can include male offenders up to age 24 years and female prisoners or immigrant detainees.

Staff working within Mental Health Services in Hydebank Wood at December 2011

Grade	Headcount
Psychiatrist	1
Staff Grade Doctor in Psychiatry	1
Principal Psychologist/Trainee Forensic Psychologist	2
Psychology Assistants	3
Mental Health Nurse	3
Part-time Occupational Therapist	1
Youth Addiction Counsellor	4

Grade	Headcount
Nurse Support	2

Source: South Eastern HSC Trust

Hydebank Wood: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety which statutory body is responsible for the provision of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services for 15-17 year olds in Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre.
(AQW 5785/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust is responsible for the delivery of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in Hydebank. The service is commissioned by the Health and Social Care Board.

Mindwise

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has for the day support services and the recovery plans that are used to enhance the quality of life for people with mental illness, which are currently provided by Mind Wise.
(AQW 5799/11-15)

Mr Poots: The four Health and Social Care Trusts which use the services of MindWise have confirmed that there are no plans to discontinue contracts for the provision of day support services. The Western Health and Social Care Trust does not have any contracts with MindWise.

Western Health and Social Care Trust : Post-operative Deaths

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of deaths which have occurred post-operatively in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area in each of the last three years; (ii) how many of these deaths have been attributed to (a) medical malpractice; (b) age; or (c) terminal illness; and (iii) how these figures compare to those in other Trust areas.
(AQW 5802/11-15)

Mr Poots: Doctors are not required to supply information on recent surgical procedures at death registration, therefore it is not possible to determine the number of deaths which have occurred post-operatively in Northern Ireland, or the reason attributed to these deaths.

MRSA: Western Health and Social Care Trust

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) cases in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area, compared to the other Trust areas, in each of the last 12 months.
(AQW 5803/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the number of MRSA cases within the Western Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust area is not available. However, information is available on the number of MRSA patient episodes within each HSC Trust during each of the last four quarters, and is detailed in the table below.

	Number of MRSA patient episodes			
HSC Trust	Oct – Dec 2010	Jan – Mar 2011	Apr – Jun 2011	Jul – Sep 2011
Belfast	9	12	4	20
Northern	6	5	8	4
South Eastern	3	2	6	2
Southern	4	1	3	2
Western	3	5	0	3
Northern Ireland	25	25	21	31

Source: Public Health Agency

Royal Victoria Hospital: Patient Transfer

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many taxis the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has used to transport patients from the Accident and Emergency Department in the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast, to the Belfast City Hospital, since the closure of Belfast City Hospital's Accident and Emergency Department.
(AQW 5812/11-15)

Mr Poots: Since the closure of the Belfast City hospital's emergency care department on 1st November 2011, the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust have used 1 taxi to transport patients from the emergency care department in the Royal Victoria Hospital to the Belfast City Hospital.

Belfast City Hospital: Accident and Emergency

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) since the closure of the Belfast City Hospital's Accident and Emergency Department, how many times the (a) Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast; and (b) the Mater Hospital, Belfast, have been on red alert; and (ii) what contingency arrangements are in place for dealing with a red alert.
(AQW 5814/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Belfast Trust has advised me that it has had in place for a number of years a traffic light system within its bed availability escalation policy. The Trust has further advised me that, from 1 November 2011 up to 14 December, the status was 'Red' on 5 occasions at the Royal Victoria Hospital and on 12 occasions at the Mater Hospital.

Contingency plans implemented by the Belfast Trust include maximising the number of discharges in its three acute hospitals and, where necessary, transferring patients from the Royal and Mater hospitals to the City Hospital for inpatient treatment

Since 1 November, the Health and Social Care Board in collaboration with Trusts have closely monitored the impact of the temporary closure of the Accident and Emergency department at the City Hospital.

Accident and Emergency: Waiting Times

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current average (i) trolley waiting times; and (ii) Accident and Emergency Department waiting times in the (a) Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast; and (b) the Antrim Area Hospital.
(AQW 5815/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) Information on trolley waiting times is not collected by the Department and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

(ii) Information on the average waiting times at (a) Royal Victoria and (b) Antrim Area emergency care departments is not currently available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Information on emergency care waiting times during December 2011 is not currently available, and will not be published until 26th January 2012. The latest published information on emergency care waiting times refers to the months of July, August and September 2011, and is available to view or download from:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/hospital-stats/emergency_care-3/emergency_care-monthly_waiting_times.htm

However, provisional information is available on emergency care waiting times during October and November 2011 for emergency care departments in the Belfast area. This provisional information was included in a press release issued by my Department on Friday 9th December 2011, and is available to view or download from:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/ec1data.pdf

Voluntary Sector

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he can offer an assurance that existing services provided by the voluntary sector will not be targeted for cuts from April 2012.
(AQW 5819/11-15)

Mr Poots: The voluntary sector plays an essential and integral role in the provision of health and social care services throughout Northern Ireland. However, the financial challenges facing my Department over the Budget 2010 period are considerable. Whilst my priority is ensuring the quality of HSC services and safety of patients, my Department will have to examine all areas of its budget in order to address the financial challenges and ensure that funding is allocated in the most effective manner.

Accident and Emergency: Lagan Valley Hospital

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made in restoring 24 hour access to the Accident and Emergency Unit at Lagan Valley Hospital.
(AQW 5820/11-15)

Mr Poots: The changes which have been made to the opening hours of the emergency department at the Lagan Valley Hospital remain in place. These changes are temporary and proposals for any permanent change will be issued for full public consultation.

Lagan Valley Hospital: Capital Investment

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the business case for capital investment at the Lagan Valley Hospital site.
(AQW 5821/11-15)

Mr Poots: Discussions are continuing with the South Eastern HSC Trust regarding preparation of a business case for redeveloping the Lagan Valley Hospital site. This is just one of a number of projects I would like to progress. I am currently revisiting the planned capital programme to ensure that I am addresssing the highest priorities across all programmes of care. Unfortunately the level of funding available to me is insufficient to meet all the demands being placed on the health service and I am investigating how best to supplement the capital budget by alternative funding mechanisms. I will also be looking closely at the implications of the recommendations arising from the recently announced HSC Review and how this will affect planned capital projects.

Hip Replacements

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people currently on the waiting list for a hip replacement operation, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area.
(AQW 5823/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of people on the waiting list for a hip replacement operation, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust, at 30th September 2011 (the most recent date for which official data are available) is shown in the table below.

HSC Trust	Number of people on the waiting list for a hip replacement operation at 30th September 2011
Belfast	712
Northern	N/A
South Eastern	1
Southern	149
Western	338
NI Total	1,200

Source: DHSSPS Inpatient Waiting Times Dataset

Hip Replacements

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average waiting time for a hip replacement operation in each Health and Social Care Trust area.
(AQW 5824/11-15)

Mr Poots: The average waiting time for a hip replacement operation, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust, at 30th September 2011 (the most recent date for which official data are available) is shown in the table below.

HSC Trust	Average waiting time for a hip replacement operation at 30th September 2011
Belfast	128 days (18 weeks)
Northern	N/A
South Eastern	38 days (5 weeks)
Southern	116 days (16 weeks)
Western	167 days (24 weeks)
Northern Ireland	137 days (20 weeks)

Source: DHSSPS Inpatient Waiting Times Dataset

Prescription Medicines

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to ensure that medication is not wasted in the home or in pharmacies.
(AQW 5829/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department in collaboration with the Health and Social Care Board and the Government Advertising Unit, OFMDM, has developed a public information campaign to address the issue of unused and wasted prescription medicines in Northern Ireland which is estimated to cost around £18m annually.

Phase 1 of the campaign, which ran from December 2010 to March 2011, was aimed at reducing the level of prescription drug wastage caused by patients over-ordering medicines on repeat prescriptions through the message "Don't Use it? Don't Order it".

Phase 2 of the campaign commenced in November 2011 with the message "Follow the Advice Use it Right". The aim remains the prevention of medicine waste but places additional emphasis on the health of the individual, particularly in the management of long term conditions, advising patients to use medicines as directed and only order those that they use.

Community Pharmacies

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to hold a discussion with all representatives of pharmacies as a group.
(AQW 5830/11-15)

Mr Poots: I would welcome the opportunity to engage with the pharmacy profession to discuss how we can take forward community pharmacy services for the benefit of patients in Northern Ireland.

Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland (CPNI), the representative body for community pharmacists in Northern Ireland, sought and was granted a Judicial Review of the new remuneration and reimbursement arrangements for community pharmacists. Against this background it would be inappropriate for me to meet with representatives of the pharmacy profession until the outcome of the hearing is known.

I can confirm however that I have already undertaken to engage with CPNI representatives as soon as reasonably practical thereafter.

Ministerial Sub-group on Suicide and Self-harm

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the work of the Ministerial Sub-Group on suicide and self-harm.
(AQW 5846/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Ministerial Co-ordination Group on Suicide Prevention meets on an ad hoc basis in response to issues which require cross departmental action.

The refresh of the Protect Life strategy is due for publication in early 2012, and it will contain a number of cross cutting actions which will need the support of Ministerial colleagues to take forward. It is therefore my intention to convene a further meeting of the Ministerial Co-ordination Group around that time in order to agree the necessary next steps.

Belfast City Hospital: Resuscitation Area

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that the resuscitation area at the Belfast City Hospital is closed, where is a person who has had a cardiac arrest, outside of hospital, transferred to for immediate resuscitation care, and what protocols are in place.
(AQW 5847/11-15)

Mr Poots: In the event of an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest, the same procedures as always will apply; when 999 is called, an emergency ambulance will be dispatched to the scene. The patient will then be brought to the closest Emergency Department – in Belfast that would be either the RVH or the Mater Hospital.

The ambulance crew will alert the receiving Emergency Department, who will prepare a team in the resuscitation room for receipt of the patient. The immediate resuscitation of the patient will be provided by the paramedics in the ambulance.

If the cardiac arrest should occur within the grounds of the BCH, the same procedure should be followed; dial 999 for an Emergency Ambulance.

If the cardiac arrest occurs within the BCH building, there is a resuscitation team available, who will be contacted by the switchboard.

Royal Victoria Hospital: Accident and Emergency

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the average waiting time at the Accident and Emergency Department at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast, since the closure of the Accident and Emergency Department at Belfast City Hospital.
(AQW 5862/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the average waiting time at the Royal Victoria emergency care department is not currently available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Information on emergency care waiting times during December 2011 is not currently available, and will not be published until 26th January 2012. The latest published information on emergency care waiting times refers to the months of July, August and September 2011, and is available to view or download from:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/hospital-stats/emergency_care-3/emergency_care-monthly_waiting_times.htm

However, provisional information is available on emergency care waiting times during October and November 2011 for emergency care departments in the Belfast area. This provisional information was included in a press release issued by my Department on Friday 9th December 2011, and is available to view or download from:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/ec1data.pdf

Royal Victoria Hospital: Accident and Emergency

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide a breakdown of the waiting times at the Accident and Emergency Department in the Royal Victoria Hospital since 1 December 2011 to date.
(AQW 5863/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on emergency care waiting times during December 2011 is not currently available, and will not be published until 26th January 2012. The latest published information on emergency care waiting times refers to the months of July, August and September 2011, and is available to view or download from:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/hospital-stats/emergency_care-3/emergency_care-monthly_waiting_times.htm

However, provisional information is available on emergency care waiting times during October and November 2011 for emergency care departments in the Belfast area. This provisional information was included in a press release issued by my Department on Friday 9th December 2011, and is available to view or download from:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/ec1data.pdf

Health and Social Care Review

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, when determining the way forward after the publication of the Health and Social Care Review, what weight will he attach to a Health and Social Care Trust putting forward a sustainable and resilient case for retention of an acute hospital in an area which serves a rural population and which sees a massive increase in its population between March and September each year due to the number of high profile events attracting tens of thousands of visitors.
(AQW 5866/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Statement to the Assembly on 13 December explained that our aim must to have safe, resilient and sustainable services with the focus on the individual and not the institution. The Report on the Review of Health and Social Care identifies the services that a major acute hospital must be capable of delivering and sustaining. It will be for the Local Commissioning Groups and Health and Social Care Trusts initially to develop plans for their respective populations which take account of the principles and criteria set out in the Review.

Cancer Patients: Support Allowance

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has any plans, in conjunction with the Minister for Social Development, to create a permanent cancer care and support allowance to alleviate the financial difficulties facing many cancer patients during their treatment and recovery.
(AQW 5890/11-15)

Mr Poots: The announcement by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister of the Fuel Allowance Initiative to help those who are already experiencing significant levels of fuel poverty, indicated this would be a one off payment towards household fuel costs for those eligible. I have no plans to create any permanent allowance for cancer patients to help address financial difficulties during their treatment and recovery.

Community Pharmacies

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given the enhanced role the Crompton Review affords to community pharmacies to deliver the new model, whether additional funding will be allocated to community pharmacies to support them in their roles, as many are currently operating on reduced budgets.
(AQW 5891/11-15)

Mr Poots: The "Transforming Your Care" proposals envisage a changing model of care which will move care as close to home as possible. This will require additional investment in the primary and community care sectors to develop a greater range of services which people can access within the community. Community pharmacists and, indeed, other care providers will expect to be funded for any additional services they provide in the context of the review.

Community pharmacy and other healthcare providers have to look at the way they work and make any changes needed to better meet patients needs. Subject to negotiation, it is intended to put in place a new community pharmacy contract to improve

medicines management services and allow pharmacies to offer help in a range of areas including health promotion. Due to the ongoing Judicial Review instigated by CPNI of the remuneration arrangements for community pharmacists, however, it would be inappropriate for me as Minister to comment further on the development of a pharmacy contract for Northern Ireland until the outcome of the hearing is known.

Prescription Medicines

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department has taken, or intends to take, to help pharmacists prescribe medicines in a more efficient and cost effective manner.
(AQW 5892/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department's policy is that, where it is appropriate to do so, a medicine should be prescribed generically. The use of generic medicines in favour of branded equivalents is a central strand in the Department's strategy to promote improved quality in medicines management through cost effective prescribing. GPs and pharmacists are updated regularly on generic prescribing policy. In July and August this year the Department also wrote to the HSC Board and Trusts and to all GPs and community pharmacists to reaffirm the Department's policy on the best use of medicines – including the need to adhere to the policy on generic prescribing.

Generic substitution, whereby a pharmacist may substitute a generic product if one is available, in place of a branded product named on a prescription, may have a part to play in improving medicines management and cost effective prescribing. I have not ruled out taking steps to introduce generic substitution but I have no immediate plans to do so. If I do decide to introduce generic substitution in Northern Ireland it will be necessary to undertake a public consultation.

The HSC Board has been mandated to negotiate with CPNI a new pharmacy contract which should include services aimed at delivering more efficient and cost-effective medicines management arrangements.

Children's Services: Planning and Commissioning

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQO 703/11-15, for his assessment of the introduction of a statutory duty on Departments to co-operate in the planning and commissioning of children's services.
(AQW 5894/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are established mechanisms to facilitate cooperation across departments and agencies in the planning and commissioning of children's services. These include the Ministerial Sub-Committee for Children and Young People, which is chaired by Junior Ministers in the Office of the First and deputy First Minister, and the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, chaired by the Health and Social Care Board. At this stage there are no plans to introduce a statutory duty to cooperate for the purpose of planning and commissioning children's services. A decision to introduce a statutory duty to cooperate would require Executive endorsement.

DHSSPS: Agenda for Change

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the Agenda for Change, to detail (i) how many members of staff have appealed the grading offered to them; (ii) the number of outstanding appeals; and (iii) when staff will be informed of the outcome of the appeals.
(AQW 5906/11-15)

Mr Poots: At 1 December 2011 12,064 of the 12,116 staff who applied for a review of their grading have been notified of their outcome. The remaining staff will be notified of the outcome of their review as soon as is practicable.

Royal Victoria Hospital: Trolley Waits

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of (i) trolley waits; and (ii) patients who have had to wait on a trolley for more than (a) four; and (b) eight hours at the Accident and Emergency Department at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast, since 1 December 2011.
(AQW 5911/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the number of (i) trolley waits; and (ii) patients who have had to wait on a trolley for more than (a) four; and (b) eight hours at the Royal Victoria Hospital emergency care department is not collected by the Department and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mental Health

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the procedure his Department has in place for handling the medical records of patients with mental health problems; and for how long the records are kept.
(AQW 5953/11-15)

Mr Poots: Guidance for Health and Social Care organisations on the handling and retention of medical records is contained in Good Management Good Records, originally published by the Department in 2004. The records of patients with mental health conditions (within the meaning of the Mental Health Northern Ireland Order 1986) are retained for 20 years.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome in each of the last five years.
(AQW 5954/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information is not available on the number of people that have been diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome in each of the last five years, however information is available on the number of admissions to HSC Hospitals in Northern Ireland with a diagnosis of chronic fatigue syndrome was recorded.

Year	Admissions
2006/07	49
2007/08	37
2008/09	76
2009/10	79
2010/11	113

Source:- Hospital Inpatient System

Deaths and discharges are used as an approximation of admissions. It should be noted that these figures do not represent individuals as a person may be admitted to hospital more than once in a year or across a number of years.

Department of Justice

Prisoners: Released on Licence

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Justice how many prisoners, who were released on licence in the last ten years, have been (i) prosecuted; and (ii) convicted of a subsequent offence; and how many prisoners released on licence in the last ten years have been rearrested and are currently being held in prison without charge.
(AQW 4647/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): Neither the Department of Justice (DOJ) nor its partner agencies routinely collect the information requested at (i) and (ii). Precise figures are only available for recalled life sentence prisoners. Collating accurate data for the other categories of licensees could only be achieved at disproportionate cost.

Persons are released into the community on a range of licences in order to allow their behaviour for the period of time covered by the licence to be controlled and managed in a way that can help ensure that the risk they present to the public is managed effectively. Licence periods can last from very short periods of time to life. The Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland (PCNI) are responsible for drawing up licence conditions for life sentence prisoners; multi-agency assessment panels make recommendations to the DOJ for sex offender licences; and the DOJ is responsible for setting conditions for public protection licences following advice from the Prison Service and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI).

Persons released on licence may be recalled to prison to continue serving their sentence if they are deemed to present an increased risk of harm to the public. Individuals released on a sex offender licence can be recalled if a warrant to do so is granted by the court following an application by PBNI while all other licensees may be recalled directly by the DOJ, usually following a recommendation from the PCNI. However recall does not necessarily mean that an individual will have been prosecuted or convicted of a further offence. Equally it does not mean that every licensee prosecuted or convicted of a further offence will necessarily be recalled to prison. The decision to take such action is based wholly on behaviour and associated risk.

Since December 2001 41 life sentence prisoners have been recalled to prison. Of these, 28 have been prosecuted for a further offence. Of these 28 prosecutions, 23 resulted in conviction. Records indicate that at least 14 other life licensees have received letters warning them about their behaviour. Of these, 10 were prosecuted and convicted of a further offence but in these cases none of the offences suggested that the risk to the public had increased to a level to justify recall.

Finally I can confirm that no prisoners released on licence in the last 10 years are currently being held in prison without charge. Those who have been returned to custody have either had their licences revoked or suspended and are therefore liable to lawful detention under the terms of their original sentence. There may also be others who have been released on a licence which is now spent and who are now back in custody either on remand on another charge or following sentencing on conviction.

Prisoners: Threats to the Public

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice how many times members of the public have complained of being threatened over the phone by prisoners from inside each prison, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 5454/11-15)

Mr Ford: This data is not collated by the Prison Service. However, there have been a very small number of reports of prisoners making threatening phone calls, all of which were dealt with promptly by NIPS.

Prisoners may only phone numbers, provided in advance, from a maximum list of 20 numbers. Prisoners are also aware that their phone calls are recorded and monitored and that access to the phone is a privilege which may be withdrawn if there is evidence of abuse.

Prison Staff: Gardening Leave

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many Prison Service staff are currently on 'gardening leave'.
(AQW 5514/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are currently no Prison Service staff on 'gardening leave' as I understand the term.

National Offender Management Service

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department makes a financial contribution to the National Offender Management Service; and, if so, how much has been contributed since May 2010.
(AQW 5520/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department does not make any direct financial contribution to the National Offender Management Service.

DOJ: Information Service

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice how many staff are employed in his Department's Information Service; and what is the annual cost of this service.
(AQW 5533/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are twenty four members of staff employed in the Department and its Agencies Information Services. The annual cost of this service is £677,391 approximately.

The responsibilities of the twenty four staff are as outlined below:

Responsibility	Number of Staff
Information Officers on loan from the Executive Information Service	10
Administrative staff who provide a media monitoring service for other NI Departments	10
Provide a press office function within the NI Courts and Tribunal Service	4

Of the ten Information Officers on loan from the Executive Information Service, seven are in DOJ core, two in NIPS and one in YJA.

Speeding Offences

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 4576/11-15, why the revenue resulting from speeding offences has decreased when the number of offences detected has increased.
(AQW 5614/11-15)

Mr Ford: Since June 2010 the Speed Awareness Scheme and Young Drivers Scheme are now offered by PSNI to those motorists who are detected speeding at the lower end of the offending scale, as an alternative to the Fixed Penalty. As a consequence income through safety camera detections has reduced. Information on each initiative is available on the PSNI website.

Anti-social Behaviour Orders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many Anti-Social Behaviour Orders are currently active in each court division, broken down by (i) adult; and (ii) juvenile.
(AQW 5651/11-15)

Mr Ford: As of 1 December 2011 there were 44 Anti-Social Behaviour Orders in force in Northern Ireland. The table below sets out the number of active Anti-Social Behaviour Orders for each court Division broken down by adult and youth defendants.

Division	Number of Active Orders	
	Adult	Youth
Antrim	9	4
Ards	2	0
Armagh & South Down	4	0

Division	Number of Active Orders	
	Adult	Youth
Belfast	11	11
Craigavon	2	0
Fermanagh & Tyrone	1	0
Londonderry	0	0
Total	**29**	**15**

Notes:

1 Data for orders made prior to 2011 are based on information provided by the relevant authorities to the Department of Justice.

2 Data for orders made during 2011 provided by NI Courts and Tribunals Service.

3 All figures are based on operational information and may be subject to change.

4 Adults aged 18 or over; Youths aged under 18 at the time the ASBO was made.

Maghaberry Prison: Officers' Mess

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether the Officer's Mess at Maghaberry Prison is closed; and if so, when it closed and who took the decision that it should close.
(AQW 5652/11-15)

Mr Ford: The mess at Maghaberry Prison is not closed. However, since 1 May 2010, food has been provided using vending machines. The decision to provide food in this way was taken by NIPS management.

Robert Black: Transport Costs

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how Robert Black was transported to Northern Ireland for sentencing on 8 December 2011; and how much his transport cost.
(AQW 5704/11-15)

Mr Ford: Robert Black was transferred to court on the 8 December from Maghaberry Prison, where he has been in custody since 8 September.

The cost to transport him to and from court on the day was £147.75.

Hydebank Wood: Attempted Suicides

Ms Gildernew asked the Minister of Justice (i) how many 15 -17 year olds in Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre have, on at least one occasion, attempted suicide in the last ten years; (ii) how many of these young people had a statement of special educational needs; and (iii) how many were on the Child Protection Register.
(AQW 5713/11-15)

Mr Ford: Since January 2010, when NIPS introduced its policy on Supporting Prisoners at Risk (SPAR), three inmates aged under 18 have been recorded as having attempted suicide. Details on the number of cases prior to January 2010 would only be available by conducting a manual search and this information can only be provided at disproportionate cost to the public purse.

The Prison Service does not hold information on young people in custody with a Statement of Educational Needs. Nor does it have records of young people in custody who are on the Child Protection Register as responsibility for the Healthcare Function was passed to the South Eastern Trust in 2008.

Prison Service Staff: Key Workers

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice to outline the qualifications that must be held by prison staff known as 'key workers'.
(AQW 5714/11-15)

Mr Ford: The term 'key worker' is used within the Northern Ireland Prison Service, in the context of healthcare, to describe a designated staff member who will be allocated specific cases which they will monitor throughout a period in custody.

A 'key worker' will be either a qualified nurse who is on the Register of the Nursing and Midwifery Council or a Healthcare Assistant with an NVQ level 2 qualification in a healthcare science.

Animal Cruelty

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many convictions have been secured for animal cruelty in each of the last three years, broken down by court division.
(AQW 5772/11-15)

Mr Ford: Animal cruelty offences span a number of statutes but I understand that the member is interested specifically in cruelty to animals offences prosecuted under Section 13 of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972.

The table below gives the number of convictions for animal cruelty for the calendar years 2006 to 2008 (the latest year for which figures are currently available).

Number of convictions for animal cruelty by court division, 2006-2008

Court division	2006	2007	2008
Antrim	2	7	4
Ards	4	2	1
Armagh and South Down	2	4	3
Belfast	0	6	3
Craigavon and Lisburn	1	0	0
Fermanagh and Tyrone	2	1	2
Londonderry	2	0	0
Total	**13**	**20**	**13**

Data for 2006 should not be directly compared with data from 2007 to 2008 as the data sets are sourced from different systems.

Bangor Courthouse: Closure

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what assurances he can give on the speed of the delivery of justice in North Down, should Bangor Courthouse close.
(AQW 5778/11-15)

Mr Ford: I do not anticipate that the proposed closure of Bangor Courthouse will have an adverse impact on the speed of the delivery of justice in North Down. Under the current proposals, all of the scheduled court sittings at Bangor, together with any outstanding business, would be transferred to Newtownards Courthouse. There would be no reduction in the number of sittings available.

Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service staff who work in Bangor Hearing Centre are already based at Newtownards Courthouse and no job losses are anticipated should Bangor Hearing Centre close.

My Department has no plans to make alternative use of Bangor Courthouse should it be permanently closed. In the first instance it would be offered to other departments to utilise and, if not required, may be placed on the open market. Approval for the sale of any of the Hearing Centres would be subject to a business case approved by the Department of Finance & Personnel.

Bangor Courthouse: Future Use of Building

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what plans his Department has for the use of Bangor Courthouse building, if the building is no longer to be used for court proceedings.
(AQW 5779/11-15)

Mr Ford: I do not anticipate that the proposed closure of Bangor Courthouse will have an adverse impact on the speed of the delivery of justice in North Down. Under the current proposals, all of the scheduled court sittings at Bangor, together with any outstanding business, would be transferred to Newtownards Courthouse. There would be no reduction in the number of sittings available.

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Bangor Courthouse: Staff

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what assurances he can give to staff working in Bangor Courthouse, if the Courthouse is to close.
(AQW 5780/11-15)

Mr Ford: I do not anticipate that the proposed closure of Bangor Courthouse will have an adverse impact on the speed of the delivery of justice in North Down. Under the current proposals, all of the scheduled court sittings at Bangor, together with any outstanding business, would be transferred to Newtownards Courthouse. There would be no reduction in the number of sittings available.

Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service staff who work in Bangor Hearing Centre are already based at Newtownards Courthouse and no job losses are anticipated should Bangor Hearing Centre close.

My Department has no plans to make alternative use of Bangor Courthouse should it be permanently closed. In the first instance it would be offered to other departments to utilise and, if not required, may be placed on the open market. Approval for the sale of any of the Hearing Centres would be subject to a business case approved by the Department of Finance & Personnel.

Bangor Courthouse: Outstanding Cases

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice, should Bangor Courthouse be closed, whether the outstanding cases that would have been heard there will be heard in Newtownards Courthouse.
(AQW 5781/11-15)

Mr Ford: I do not anticipate that the proposed closure of Bangor Courthouse will have an adverse impact on the speed of the delivery of justice in North Down. Under the current proposals, all of the scheduled court sittings at Bangor, together with any outstanding business, would be transferred to Newtownards Courthouse. There would be no reduction in the number of sittings available.

Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service staff who work in Bangor Hearing Centre are already based at Newtownards Courthouse and no job losses are anticipated should Bangor Hearing Centre close.

My Department has no plans to make alternative use of Bangor Courthouse should it be permanently closed. In the first instance it would be offered to other departments to utilise and, if not required, may be placed on the open market. Approval for the sale of any of the Hearing Centres would be subject to a business case approved by the Department of Finance & Personnel.

Court Cases

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how many cases have been processed at each courthouse, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 5782/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below sets out the number of cases processed at each court office and in the Civil Processing Centre across all business areas.

	Cases Dealt With [2]					
Processing office [1]	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**Total**
Antrim	2622	2966	2606	2901	3257	14352
Ballymena	4338	4728	4343	4180	3448	21037
Coleraine	4730	4408	3739	3784	3852	20513
Larne	1233	1001	925	896	757	4812
Bangor	2557	2298	2115	1795	1846	10611
Downpatrick	3330	2957	2689	2407	2315	13698
Newtownards	5402	5575	5431	5620	6317	28345
Armagh	2320	1947	2086	2249	2098	10700
Banbridge	1627	1300	1180	1539	1274	6920
Newry	4850	5103	5490	5456	5705	26604
Belfast	27354	24745	23322	23547	25283	124251
Craigavon	4912	4751	4823	4450	5180	24116
Lisburn	4163	4260	3859	4379	4472	21133

Processing office [1]	Cases Dealt With [2]					
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total
Dungannon	5477	4765	4404	4686	4415	23747
Enniskillen	2801	2110	1986	2314	2542	11753
Omagh	4060	3789	3561	3485	3617	18512
Strabane	2082	1450	1165	1353	1226	7276
Limavady	1460	1425	1190	1363	1109	6547
Londonderry	7675	7065	5745	6701	6325	33511
Magherafelt	1282	1149	1146	1211	1204	5992
Civil Processing Centre	8270	11012	11464	12665	12475	55886
High Court	20752	20022	24365	20992	22965	109096
Total	**123297**	**118826**	**117634**	**117973**	**121682**	**599412**

[1] Court offices based on the processing office as recorded on ICOS for 2007-2010. In 2006 Crown Court, Magistrates' Court, family and Children Order business were recorded on manual forms and reflect the court office which disposed of/ dealt with the case. The Civil Processing Centre is a centralised office for small claims and civil bill business. Cases may relate to any County Court division but be processed there. In 2006 civil County Court business was recorded on ICOS and therefore the court offices are based on the processing office as recorded on ICOS. A case may be processed at one venue and heard at another.

[2] Cases dealt with are based on criminal defendants, civil and family cases, Children Order cases and applications disposed of. Debt cases in the Magistrates' Court (from 2007 onwards) and licensing in the Magistrates' and County Court are excluded as these numbers are held manually and not centrally collated.

Hydebank Wood: Attempted Suicides

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Justice how many 15 -17 year olds in Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre have, on at least one occasion, attempted suicide in the last ten years.
(AQW 5786/11-15)

Mr Ford: Since January 2010, when NIPS introduced its policy on Supporting Prisoners at Risk (SPAR), three inmates aged under 18 are recorded as having attempted suicide. Details on the number of cases prior to January 2010 would only be available by conducting a manual search and this information can only be provided at disproportionate cost to the public purse.

Hydebank Wood

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Justice how many of the 15-17 year olds who are detained in Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre are (i) on remand; and (ii) sentenced prisoners.
(AQW 5787/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are currently five 15-17 year olds detained in Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre, of these inmates one is on remand and four are sentenced.

Patricia Young: Case Costs

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost to date of the case against Patricia Young, including the defence costs paid that were through legal aid and the costs of the Public Prosecution Service; and what is the anticipated final cost of this case.
(AQW 5813/11-15)

Mr Ford: The proceedings against Patricia Young comprised two different cases. The table below sets out the costs of the initial proceedings (Case No. 10/80754).

Cost Type	Estimated Cost
PSNI Prosecution	£1037
PPS Prosecution	£150
Probation Board for Northern Ireland	£208

Cost Type	Estimated Cost
Defence (Legal Aid Costs)	£1258
Court (Judiciary and Staff Costs)	£233
Facilities (e.g. Courtroom Accommodation)	£90
Total	**£2976**

The current proceedings against Patricia Young (Case No.11/16273) have not yet reached hearing stage and have so far consisted of several adjournment hearings, a judicial review and a case stated. The total court and judicial costs associated with these hearings are estimated at £2,638.

The Public Prosecution Service (PPS) has identified billed costs and fees to date of approximately £10,600 in relation to the Judicial Review and £180 for the original contest on 21 January 2011. However, the invoice for junior counsel has not yet been received and there is an ongoing case stated appeal. Adjournment hearings have been attended by PPS prosecutors and there has not been any cost over and above their PPS salary costs.

The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission has confirmed that it is not possible to provide an estimate of legal aid costs at this stage as these are dependant on case outcome.

The police have confirmed that there are no additional police costs associated with the current proceedings.

As the nature of the final hearing is not known, it is difficult to assess with any accuracy what the final costs are likely to be. The estimated court and judicial costs associated with a one day contested hearing in the Magistrates' Court would be approximately £930.

Bangor Courthouse: Closure

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Justice to outline the rationale behind the plans to close Bangor Courthouse.
(AQW 5840/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service (NICTS) is currently consulting on proposals for the permanent closure of five Hearing Centres, including Bangor, and for the transfer of court business to alternative venues.

The NICTS now faces a more challenging economic environment and must deliver efficiencies. It is estimated that the proposed closures could save approximately £400,000 per annum in operating costs, £80,000 of which relates to Bangor Courthouse. In addition it is estimated that the Hearing Centres would require in excess of £3m capital expenditure to ensure that they are fit for purpose in future years, £544,000 of which relates to Bangor Courthouse. The closure of the Hearing Centres would allow any available capital resource to be utilised on other court venues.

Driving: Disqualifications

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether a person who has been disqualified from driving for a protracted period, can apply to have this period of disqualification reduced after a specific timeframe if they have not re-offended.
(AQW 5841/11-15)

Mr Ford: Under article 47 of the Road Traffic Offenders (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 an individual who has been disqualified from driving may after a fixed period, which depends on the length of their disqualification, apply to the court to remove the disqualification.

The application can be made after two years for disqualifications up to four years; after half the disqualification has elapsed for disqualification periods of four to ten years; or after five years for disqualifications longer than ten years. Subsequent applications can not be made until at least three months after the refusal date. A person disqualified until they pass an appropriate driving test is excluded from making an application.

The court will consider the character of the person disqualified and their conduct subsequent to the imposition of the disqualification, the nature of the offence, and any other circumstances of the case as appropriate. The court can remove the disqualification from a specified date or refuse the application.

Court Hearings: Social Workers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in light of Lord Justice Stevens' direction that social workers must attend court hearings to advise on the suitability of defendants' bail addresses and conditions, in relation to vulnerable witnesses and children, whether he intends to introduce legislation to enforce this matter.
(AQW 5844/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Law Commission is currently undertaking a review of the law on bail in criminal proceedings with a view to the creation of new legislation. The Commission has a copy of Mr Justice Stevens' judgment and will be taking it into account in its analysis and recommendations. I expect to receive the Commission's legislative proposals this coming Spring.

Rape: Convictions

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how many convictions for rape have been secured in each of the last five years.
(AQW 5852/11-15)

Mr Ford: Rape offences may be prosecuted under Common Law and under Article 3(1) of the Criminal Attempts and Conspiracy (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 and Article 18 (1) Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2003.

The table below gives the number convicted for the calendar years 2004 to 2008 (the latest year for which figures are currently available).

Number of people convicted for rape 2004-2008

Year	Convictions
2004	18
2005	8
2006	11
2007	14
2008	16

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Data for 2004-2006 should not be directly compared with data from 2007 to 2008 as the data sets are sourced from different systems.

I remain committed to working with Ministerial colleagues on the implementation of the Regional Strategy on Sexual Violence and Abuse.

Prevention is key, but the strategy also aims for an improved conviction rate for sexual offences through better support for victims and an effective justice response.

Human Trafficking: Use of the Internet

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice what action his Department is taking to restrict the use of the internet for human trafficking.
(AQW 5877/11-15)

Mr Ford: Restrictions to the internet to prevent its misuse for human trafficking purposes are a law enforcement issue. PSNI works closely with other law enforcement agencies including the Serious Organised Crime Agency and the Child Exploitation Online Protection Centre to disrupt criminal activities which use the internet to facilitate crime, including human trafficking. This includes taking steps to close down internet sites.

Bangor Courthouse: Savings on Closure

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to detail the estimated savings to his Department should Bangor Courthouse close.
(AQW 5907/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is estimated that savings of £80,000 per year could be realised if Bangor Hearing Centre were to close. In addition it is estimated that £544,000 of capital expenditure would be required to ensure that Bangor Courthouse was fit for purpose in future years.

No job losses are anticipated should Bangor Hearing Centre close. Staff who work there are currently based at Newtownards Courthouse.

Bangor Courthouse: Job Losses on Closure

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice whether there will be any job losses should Bangor Courthouse close.
(AQW 5908/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is estimated that savings of £80,000 per year could be realised if Bangor Hearing Centre were to close. In addition it is estimated that £544,000 of capital expenditure would be required to ensure that Bangor Courthouse was fit for purpose in future years.

No job losses are anticipated should Bangor Hearing Centre close. Staff who work there are currently based at Newtownards Courthouse.

Police Museum

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice which Department or organisation is responsible for producing the business case to develop the Police Museum; and what is the time table for submitting it to the Department of Finance and Personnel for approval.
(AQW 5937/11-15)

Mr Ford: The RUC GC Foundation is responsible for producing the business case for the Police Museum. My Department has provided resources to help complete the business case and continues to work with the RUC GC Foundation to progress the museum. However there remain some issues to be resolved before the outline business case can be ratified by my Department and submitted to the Department of Finance and Personnel for approval. Further work is underway by my officials, RUC GC Foundation and the PSNI with a view to having all matters concluded over the next few weeks. However, the timeframe for submission of the business case is dependent on key stakeholders addressing the outstanding issues and producing a financially sound business case to meet DFP approval criteria.

Car Insurance

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the report published by the Office of Fair Trading into the cost of car insurance in Northern Ireland, what steps his Department intends to take to address the higher cost of car insurance in Northern Ireland compared with Britain.
(AQW 5940/11-15)

Mr Ford: I welcome the examination by the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) into the cost of car insurance in the UK, and in Northern Ireland specifically. The report has highlighted a number of factors that impact on the level of insurance premiums for drivers.

My department is considering the OFT findings carefully to identify matters within my area of responsibility which may impact on the level of insurance premiums paid by drivers in Northern Ireland.

Robert Black: Legal Team

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether Robert Black retained the same legal team prior to, and throughout, the duration of his trial; and whether he will be using the same team for his proposed appeal.
(AQW 5995/11-15)

Mr Ford: The same solicitor firm was retained for the duration of the Crown Court proceedings in the case of Robert Black, case number 10/644. Five different counsel have been on record at various times during the course of the proceedings.

As of 16 December 2011, no appeal has been lodged in this case.

Vetting

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many versions of the Access NI clearance/vetting forms there have been since it was established.
(AQW 5997/11-15)

Mr Ford: When AccessNI commenced work on 1 April 2008 there was a single application form on which applications could be made for basic, standard or enhanced checks.

With the development of the Vetting and Barring Scheme, originally due to commence on 26 July 2010, it was necessary to create a new enhanced/ standard check application form and, as a result, a separate form for basic checks.

At that time AccessNI undertook an extensive publicity campaign with Registered and Umbrella bodies concerning the change.

While the previous Vetting and Barring Scheme was suspended and then cancelled by the UK Government, I agreed that the new forms should be introduced anyway as they were was shorter than the previous form and created efficiencies in the processing of applications. The new forms were put on line and relevant bodies notified.

Neighbourhood Watch Schemes

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to detail the functioning Neighbourhood Watch Schemes in the North Down constituency.
(AQW 5998/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are currently 29 functioning Neighbourhood Watch Schemes in North Down covering 1116 households. A list detailing the schemes is attached at Annex A.

Annex A

Details of Neighbourhood Watch Scheme in the North Down Constituency

	Name of Scheme	No of Households
1	Clandeboye Road Neighbourhood Watch	50

	Name of Scheme	No of Households
2	Harbour Ward (Southwell Road)	50
3	Grange Avenue Neighbourhood Watch	20
4	Station Road Neighbourhood Watch	29
5	Church Avenue Neighbourhood Watch	32
6	Helen's Bay and Crawfordsburn Residents Association	40
7	Crawfordsburn Road Neighbourhood Watch	92
8	Meadow Way/Burnside Park Neighbourhood Watch	34
9	Brandon Grove Neighbourhood Watch	25
10	Cargoes Crescent and Cootehall Park Neighbourhood Watch	62
11	Fort Road Neighbourhood Watch	70
12	Cootehall Road/Cooleen Gardens Neighbourhood Watch	50
13	Briarwood Neighbourhood Watch	28
14	Sheridan Drive Neighbourhood Watch	54
15	Tughan Court Neighbourhood Watch	42
16	Belgravia Road Neighbourhood Watch	25
17	Towerview Gardens, Bangor, Neighbourhood Watch	14
18	Innisbrook Gardens Neighbourhood Watch	10
19	Grey's Point Helen's Bay Neighbourhood Watch	20
20	Corvally Court Neighbourhood Watch	7
21	Pinehill Neighbourhood Watch	31
22	Briarwood Park Neighbourhood Watch	32
23	Craigdarragh Neighbourhood Watch	32
24	Woodlands Neighbourhood Watch	12
25	Tonic Fold Neighbourhood Watch	105
26	Cranley Road Neighbourhood Watch	58
27	Stratford Neighbourhood Watch	30
28	Vernon Park Neighbourhood Watch	12
29	Cedar Grove 2 Neighbourhood Watch	50
Total	**29**	**1116**

Neighbourhood Watch Schemes

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how many Neighbourhood Watch Schemes have been established in each of the last three years.
(AQW 5999/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice came into being on the 12 April 2010, since that time 175 Neighbourhood Watch Schemes have been established.

- 58 Schemes April – December 2010
- 117 Schemes January 2011 - present

Vetting

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice whether there are any plans to change the requirement for separate Access NI checks for every job application.
(AQW 6027/11-15)

Mr Ford: In August 2011 I published a report by Sunita Mason, the Independent Advisor for Criminality Information in England and Wales, on the criminal records regime in Northern Ireland. Recommendation 6 of that report said "I recommend that a system of portable disclosures and updated online checking be introduced as quickly as possible".

On 14 December I issued a public consultation document in response to that report. Paragraph 1.11 of that document states that I have accepted this recommendation and that I will seek to make the required legislative changes in the next Justice Bill.

Vetting

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice, on average, how long it takes to process an Access NI check.
(AQW 6028/11-15)

Mr Ford: The following table sets out the average time taken to deliver a check by AccessNI between 1 April and 30 September 2011:

Type of check	Average days to deliver
Basic	6.5
Standard	6.5
Enhanced	19.4

AccessNI publishes estimated average turnaround times each week on the DoJ website.

Vetting

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice why applicants who apply for multiple Access NI checks within the same month are charged the full amount for each check.
(AQW 6029/11-15)

Mr Ford: AccessNI is required by legislation to charge a fee for each application received. The levels of fees are set out in Regulations.

AccessNI recommends that certificates should not be transferred from one job to another in view of the potential risk to safeguarding vulnerable groups. Conviction information on that certificate may have changed even in a relatively short period of time or the positions applied for across applications may be different or with a different group of vulnerable people.

In August 2011, I published a report by Sunita Mason, the Independent Advisor for Criminality Information in England and Wales, on the criminal records regime in Northern Ireland.

Recommendation 6 of that report said "I recommend that a system of portable disclosures and updated online checking be introduced as quickly as possible". On 14 December I issued a public consultation document in response to that report. Paragraph 1.11 of that document states that I have accepted this recommendation and that I will seek to make the required legislative changes in the next Justice Bill. Where an applicant opts to use that system there will be no need for multiple applications to be made.

Bangor Courthouse

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice on how many days a week Bangor Courthouse currently operates.
(AQW 6040/11-15)

Mr Ford: Bangor Courthouse currently has scheduled Magistrates' Courts two days a week, on a Wednesday and Friday. In addition it is used occasionally for County Court business.

Courthouses: Closure

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice, in regard to the proposals to close the courthouses in Larne and Limavady, what consideration has been given to the winter travelling conditions which can exist between Larne and Ballymena and Limavady and Coleraine due to the high elevation of the connecting roads; and how this is factored into the provision of a local and accessible service.
(AQW 6065/11-15)

Mr Ford: Under the proposals the business currently dealt with at the Hearing Centres would be transferred to an alternative court venue. Although some people may have to travel further to court I believe that the proposals still make appropriate

provision for access to justice. While the majority of court users travel by private transport, there are convenient bus links for those using public transport.

During the development of the proposals it was confirmed that the main roads between Larne and Ballymena and Limavady and Coleraine are on the Roads Service main salting routes throughout the Winter. In the event of adverse Winter travelling conditions, where the court is notified that a person is unable to attend or will be delayed in attending due to transport difficulties, this will be conveyed to the judiciary who will determine how best to deal with the matter.

Courthouses: Closure

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the affirmations in the proposals for Hearing Centres in 2009 that the steps outlined in these proposals were not a precursor to full closure, whether his Department is now proposing what was denied in 2009.
(AQW 6068/11-15)

Mr Ford: In 2009 the former Northern Ireland Court Service stated that the Hearing Centres initiative was about making best use of scarce resources, including staff, and that it was not a precursor to the full closure of the premises involved. At that time consultees were advised that full closure would not occur without another public consultation. Circumstances have changed and the Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service is now operating within a more challenging economic environment and must deliver efficiencies. A reduction in the court estate is one of a wider package of savings plans which includes the proposed closure of the five Hearing Centres.

Department for Regional Development

Brownfield Sites

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the current definition of brownfield sites; and to detail whether how this definition has been changed, or proposed to be changed, over the last four years.
(AQW 5485/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): The current definition of Brownfield land is set out in the Adjustments to the Regional Development Strategy 2025 (June 2008). This specifies that previously developed land (also commonly referred to as Brownfield land) is that which is, or was, occupied by a permanent structure within a defined settlement limit. The term may encompass vacant or derelict lands; infill sites; land occupied by redundant or under-used buildings; a piece of industrial or commercial property that is abandoned or under-used and often environmentally contaminated.

The following are excluded from the definition of "previously developed land":

- open space of public value as defined in Planning Policy Statement 8 'Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation'; and
- the gardens of dwellings and apartments (broadly defined as those areas within the curtilage of a dwelling not containing buildings)".

In January 2011, my Department issued a consultation document entitled the "Regional Development Strategy 10 year review". This suggested a change in the definition of Brownfield land to restrict this to "land that was formerly industrial or commercial, including vacant or unused land and buildings which have been last used for industrial/commercial purposes".

This is being reconsidered on foot of the consultation and representations made to my Department.

Roads Service

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development what percentage of emails or letters that Roads Service receives from elected representatives are replied to via email or letter; and what is the average time taken to respond.
(AQW 5579/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that all emails and letters from elected representatives are responded to in the same medium they are received. However, it does not maintain separate records of the number of emails and letters received from public representatives and therefore is unable to provide details of the average time taken to respond.

Roads Service annually reports its performance for responding to written enquiries from customers (which include public representatives). Figures for the 2011/12 financial year are not yet available, however, in 2010/11, 94% of written enquiries were responded to within the 15 working day target.

A6 Road Upgrade

Mrs Overend asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the current position of the proposed A6 road upgrade.
(AQW 5580/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that following the recent publication of the Magherafelt Area Plan, the Department proposes to reconvene the Public Inquiry into the Annaghmore Road/Bellshill Road alternative junction arrangement, in mid-February 2012.

In addition to a successful outcome to the Public Inquiry, delivery of this scheme will be subject to successful procurement and the availability of finance.

Recent developments relating to the Irish Government's proposed funding of the A5 and A8 will also undoubtedly affect the funding available to my Department. When funding is confirmed, I will review spending priorities across my Department, including the impact on the Strategic Roads Programme.

A5 Road Scheme

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total cost to date of the public inquiry on the A5 road scheme.
(AQW 5596/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the total cost associated with the Public Inquiry into the A5 Western Transport Corridor scheme is £1.21m.

This amount reflects all external costs associated with organisation of, and preparation for, the Public Inquiry as well as the running of the 8 week Inquiry and progression of follow-up works undertaken by Roads Service's advisors and the Inspectors.

NI Water: Compensation to Customers

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 4814/11-15, (i) under what circumstances NI Water pays compensation to customers for the interruption of their water supply; (ii) what are the criteria applied; and (iii) why the Ballymoney residents, who were without their supply for a week, are not eligible for compensation.
(AQW 5667/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: (i) The Water and Sewerage Services (NI) Order 2006 places water supply duties on Northern Ireland Water (NIW) and if a person sustains loss or damage as a result of a breach of these duties (subject to the legislation) they are entitled to make claims against NIW. (ii) NIW is responsible for handling claims in respect of its duties and considers each individual case on its merits. (iii) I have been advised by NIW that as a precaution in the Ballymoney incident, a boil water notice was issued for consumption for food preparation, cooking and drinking. Although this was both inconvenient and regrettable during the incident the water supply was maintained to all properties and could be used for washing and sanitary purposes in the normal manner. In these circumstances there was no breach of the supply duties.

Bann Road, Ballymoney

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the extension of the miles per hour speed limit on the Bann Road, Ballymoney.
(AQW 5672/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that legislation for the new speed limit on the Bann Road, Ballymoney is currently being finalised. The new speed limit is expected to become operative towards the end of January 2012.

Salt Bins

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department plans to provide grit bins in town and city centres this winter.
(AQW 5699/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the winter service policy and procedures, which set out the criteria for the salting of roads, are based on the well established practice of targeting the limited resources available for this service on the busier main through routes.

That said, on roads adopted/maintained by Roads Service, which do not qualify for inclusion onto the gritting schedule, salt bins or grit piles may be provided for use by the public, on a self help basis. Providing the necessary criteria is met, there are no restrictions placed on the location or limits placed on the number of salt bins which may be provided although they will not normally be provided within 100m of another bin. This criteria also applies to town and city centres.

Roads Service has advised that arrangements are in place to maintain approximately 4,500 salt bins and almost 40,000 grit piles at pre-agreed strategic locations on public roads across Northern Ireland.

Public Transport

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to encourage car users to use public transport.
(AQW 5701/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's current proposals to promote a move from the use of private cars towards the use of public transport are included in the current Regional Transportation Strategy 2002-2012. The Strategy and the Plans which stem from

it provide for, and encourage, greater use of public transport and include proposals for improved bus and rail services, Park and Ride and Rapid Transit.

Public consultation on a revised Regional Transportation Strategy closed on 28 June 2011. The review proposes a new approach to regional transportation, one which places even more emphasis on securing a shift away from the use of the private car to more sustainable forms of transport and focuses on moving people, and goods, rather than vehicles.

Earlier this year, my Department also published a Strategic review of Park and Ride. This recognises the importance of Park and Ride in promoting sustainable transport and makes a number of recommendations which aim to maximise modal shift to public transport. The Review identifies the Park and Ride sites which the Department will prioritise as available funding permits.

To support modal shift, my Department continues to invest in measures which aim to improve the quality and reliability of public transport. Within the Belfast Metropolitan area, for example, there are now almost 50km of bus lanes, making travel by public transport a more attractive alternative at peak times. My Department has also provided several bus turning circles in the Belfast Metropolitan area, allowing bus services to be extended. A further bus turning circle in West Belfast will be constructed in 2012/13, subject to funding and proposals are currently being considered to introduce bus priority measures in Londonderry; My Department's Roads Service also considers new or improved footways, crossing and cycling facilities where a need has been identified, especially on schemes where they would provide a link to bus and rail services.

My Department is currently developing a new pilot Rapid Transit system in Belfast which will link East Belfast, West Belfast and Titanic Quarter with and through the city centre. By providing an attractive alternative, the Belfast Rapid Transit system, which will include Park and Ride facilities at key locations, will encourage car users onto public transport.

Road Calming Measures

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new road calming measures are planned for the North Down area in the next financial year.
(AQW 5702/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my answer to his Assembly Question AQW 1815/11-15.

Salt or Grit Purchase

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department purchases salt or grit for the road network from a local supplier, and if not, from where is the salf or grit purchased.
(AQW 5703/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it purchases salt from the Irish Salt Mining and Exploration Co. Ltd, 10 Fort Road, Kilroot, Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim.

Grit supplies are readily available from local quarries and are purchased, under contract, as required by local section offices.

Regional Transportation Strategy Consultation Document

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development, given that the Regional Transportation Strategy consultation document acknowledges the desirability of moving people away from using car and towards more sustainable means of transport, why the twelve proposed objectives in the document do not include an objective to achieve such a modal shift; and whether he will consider the inclusion of a specific target to achieve a modal shift in the finalised strategy.
(AQW 5744/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In developing the New Approach to Regional Transportation, we have outlined the Strategic aims and objectives which we want to work towards revolving around: Support the Growth of the Economy, Enhance the quality of life for all, and Reduce the Environmental Impact of Transport.

Modal shift from individual car use to more sustainable patterns of travel will play an important part in achieving these Strategic high level aims and objectives; but it is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

As the costed Delivery Plan is developed, specific targets for achievement will be set, including targets for modal shift. The targets will assume full implementation of the Strategic Transportation Interventions in the Delivery Plans and will be both challenging and realistic.

Regional Transportation Strategy Consultation Document

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development, given that the Regional Transportation Strategy consultation document acknowledges that greenhouse gas emissions from transport must be reduced, why the document does not contain a specific target to achieve such a reduction; and whether he will consider the inclusion of a specific target for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from transport in the finalised strategy.
(AQW 5745/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: In developing the New Approach to Regional Transportation, we have outlined the Strategic Objectives which we want to work towards including "Reduce Greenhouse gas emissions from transport".

The use of the proposed Policy Prioritisation Framework will ensure that potential Strategic Transport Interventions are assessed for their ability to contribute to this Strategic Objective before they are included in the Delivery Plan. As the costed Delivery Plan is developed, specific targets for achievement will be set, including targets for greenhouse gas emissions. These targets will assume full implementation of the Strategic Transportation Interventions in the Delivery Plans and will be both challenging and realistic.

Port of Larne

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department is taking to integrate the Port of Larne with the Larne Railway Line.
(AQW 5746/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The railway station at Larne Harbour is integrated with the ferry passenger terminal and the majority of rail services are planned to link with both ferry departures and arrivals to ensure good connectivity. I am not aware of any commercially viable freight opportunities which would support the development of direct rail connections to the freight handling area within Larne Harbour. Northern Ireland Railways, along with representatives from my Department, continues to participate in the All Ireland Freight Forum, which examines suggestions for the transfer of freight from roads to rail (or coastal shipping).

St John's Primary School, Middletown

Mr Irwin asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to ensure that the 200m stretch of road from St John's Primary School, Middletown to the main Armagh/Monaghan Road is included in the winter salting programme.
(AQW 5765/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the 200 metre stretch of road from St John's Primary School, Middletown, to the main Armagh/Monaghan Road, does not meet the criteria for inclusion on the gritting schedule. However, the school will be added to the list of rural schools which will receive priority secondary treatment during periods of ice and snow.

Road Signage

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will consider increasing the signage on roads where the speed limit drops from 50 mph to 30 mph, to encourage motorists to reduce their speed.
(AQW 5773/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that my Department's Roads Service has developed detailed policy on the determination of local speed limits and follows national guidance, contained within Chapter 5 of the Traffic Signs Manual, in relation to the erection and maintenance of speed limit signs.

The setting of speed limits on different categories of rural and urban roads that fall outside the default national limits is a complex matter and is dependent on many factors, including collision history, alignment, access points, exposure to vulnerable road users and road function. However, Roads Service officials advise that whilst there is no specific policy on increasing signage where speed limits change, local traffic engineers will always ensure that there is adequate forward sight distance for drivers to be able to have visual warning in advance of any change. Furthermore, where road users driving at excess speed into the lower speed limit have been identified, the normal solution is to erect vehicle activated signs, or visual speed indicating devices that warn drivers to slow down.

Bus Stops: West Belfast

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of bus stops in the West Belfast constituency; (ii) the number of these that have real-time digital infomation on display; and (iii) how many new real-time digital information display units are planned for West Belfast.
(AQW 5800/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised that there are 352 bus stops in the Belfast West constituency area and my Department has provided real-time passenger information displays at eight of these stops. At present, there are no plans to provide any further passenger information displays, however, the system has the facility to be expanded, should sufficient funding become available in the future.

NI Water: Fines for Water Pollution

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total amount paid in fines by NI Water for river pollution offences in the last twelve months; and what he is doing to eradicate such offending.
(AQW 5801/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that during the period 1 December 2010 to 30 November 2011 it paid £15,050 in fines for river pollution offences. These offences occurred during 2008, 2009 and 2010.

I have highlighted this issue to the Chairman of NIW and the Economic Regulator which sets NIW targets for the reduction of pollution incidents. Officials within NIW and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency are having discussions aimed at reducing the risk of future NIW pollution incidents.

The Executive's budget allocates over 600 million pounds for investment in water and sewerage services over the budget period. This investment will fund the upgrade of wastewater treatment works and the sewerage network which will, in time, help reduce pollution incidents.

Antrim Railway Station

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any plans he has to reduce the number of platform staff at Antrim Railway Station.
(AQW 5817/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink advises that following a consultation with the relevant Trade Unions, it is currently involved in a process to achieve employee efficiencies across the NI Railways network.

No employees based at Antrim Station are affected by this reduction in manpower. However whilst there will not be any reduction to staff numbers at Antrim their current range of duties/deployment will be changed to facilitate improved levels of service quality to customers.

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the risk that the use of hydraulic fracturing would pose to the water supply.
(AQW 5838/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it has been invited by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) to input into a multi-agency group on the subject of Hydraulic Fracturing in Northern Ireland. The group, which includes representatives from parties with an interest in ground water and drinking water protection, will be responsible for risk assessment and mitigation. NIW's role will be to ensure that the public health and safety aspects of the quality and quantity of drinking water provided to its customers are taken fully into account.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is responsible for the issue of licences for ground water abstraction. NIW will continue to work closely with the NIEA to ensure that protection of the public water supply remains a priority.

Town Centre Footpaths: Removal of Snow and Ice

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development which Councils have signed up to an agreement with Roads Service on the removal of snow and ice from town centre footpaths during periods of severe winter weather.[R]
(AQW 5867/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has confirmed that the following eight Councils have signed an agreement for the removal of ice and snow from town centre footways during severe winter weather:

Councils That Have Signed An Agreement		
Ballymena	Craigavon	Lisburn
Belfast City	Cookstown	North Down
Carrickfergus	Limavady	

In addition, working arrangements are in place with a number of other Councils and work is ongoing with others to confirm their position.

Translink: Staff Taxi Fares

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development how much Translink has spent on taxi fares for staff transport in each of the last five years; and why their own rail services are not used when appropriate.
(AQW 5925/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink informed me that the tables below details how much has been spent on taxi fares for staff transport in each of the last five years:

NI Railways	**2006/07**	**2007/08**	**2008/09**	**2009/10**	**2010/11**
Total	£37,519	£43,605	£52,848	£53,312	£69,597

Bus	**2006/07**	**2007/08**	**2008/09**	**2009/10**	**2010/11**
Total	£603	£293	£545	£366	£297

In relation to railways taxis are sometimes required to move train crews between depots (inter-depot working). Inter-depot working allows for major depots to cover smaller country depot staff requirements without the requirement for localised overtime. Employee taxi hire arises on occasions when train crews are required to be transferred from one location to another. Some of the staff involved may not drive or have access to a car. Likewise, there may not be appropriate public transport links at the time of day they require to travel, i.e. early starts/late finishes. Some depots/sign-on points are not located on public transport routes.

Equally, taxis are also used during service disruptions, such as security alerts, line closures, train failures and accidents, when there is a requirement to reinstate services promptly and ensure reliability of the timetable as far as is possible in order to minimise the impact of disruption on customers. In such instances, train crews often need to be re-positioned following completion of their shifts.

Costs relating to Bus are much lower due to the difference in the operational model. It is much easier to move vehicles and staff about than it is for trains and rail crews.

Translink argues that taxis are only used in bus and rail service provision when it is the most economically viable solution.

Road Links: Enniskillen

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to improve the road links between Enniskillen and (i) Cavan town; (ii) Monaghan town; and (iii) Donegal town; and (iv) Sligo town.
(AQW 5967/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Strategic Road Improvement (SRI) Programme is set out in the Investment Delivery Plan for Roads, which was published in April 2008, reflecting the outlook of the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2008 – 2018.

The SRI Programme was developed against the Government's five key criteria for Transport, that is, environment, safety, economy, accessibility and integration. Within this framework, priority was given to Key Transport Corridors, followed by the link corridors and then the trunk roads.

The SRI Programme includes two schemes to improve the traffic flow in and around Enniskillen. The schemes are the A32 Cherrymount Link, which is currently under construction, and the A4 Enniskillen Southern Bypass. Proposed upgrades to the strategic network outside Enniskillen include the A4 Fivemiletown bypass, and works to improve the A32 Enniskillen to Omagh Road to enhance access to the new hospital.

The new draft Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland covering the period 2011 – 2021, which is currently out for consultation, would facilitate the delivery of significant upgrades to our road network. However, it will mean that some schemes included in the Department's current Investment Delivery Plan may not be delivered to the timescale initially envisaged and it is unlikely that further schemes on the routes referred to in the Member's question could be included within the investment period.

My Department's Roads Service will continue to concentrate structural maintenance resources on the trunk road network in line with published targets.

Donaghmore Sewerage Plant

Mr Molloy asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to upgrade the Donaghmore sewerage plant.
(AQW 5975/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that it has commenced a detailed appraisal study to identify a solution which will address the heavily loaded treatment process at Donaghmore, taking account of existing and proposed development in the area. The identified solution and associated costs will be prioritised against other competing projects. However, it is presently scheduled to be completed within the early phase of the PC13 funding period (2013 – 2015).

Parking Tickets: Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many parking tickets have been dispensed in Bangor in each of the last two financial year.
(AQW 6041/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the number of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) issued in Bangor in each of the last two financial years are provided in the table below:

Year	PCNs Issued In Bangor
2009/10	3,672
2010/11	3,156

Parking Fines

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much money has been raised through parking fines in each of the last two financial years.
(AQW 6042/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that income from Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) in the 2009/10 financial year was £4.8 million and £4.5 million in the 2010/11 financial year.

All revenue generated by the payment of PCNs is used, along with income from car-parking and other charges, to supplement the overall financing of Roads Service by Central Government.

NI Water: Fines for Environmental Infringements

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the (i) number; and (ii) total value of fines that NI Water has received for environmental infringements in each of the last five financial years.
(AQW 6043/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that since its formation on 1 April 2007 it has received 37 convictions for environmental offences totalling £52,650. Details of the fines within each financial year are provided in the table below.

Period	Number of fines	Total Fines (£)
01/04/2007 - 31/03/2008	2	200
01/04/2008 – 31/03/2009	6	15,500
01/04/2009 – 31/03/2010	8	15,000
01/04/2010 – 31/03/2011	7	7,450
01/04/2011 – 20/12/2011*	14	14,500

* partial year

The number of prosecutions taken in 2011 reflects the delay in the Public Prosecution Service system for taking historical pollution incidents to court. It is not an indication of a significant increase in pollution incidents. Year on year, progress has already been delivered in this area, with NIW outperforming the targets set by the Utility Regulator, whilst addressing the legacy of underinvestment in sewerage and treatment systems.

NI Water: Incorrect Contact Number

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps his Department has taken to rectify the incorrect contact number for NI Water which was printed on a leaflet distributed to every household.
(AQW 6044/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that it decided not to reprint the leaflet with the incorrect number based on a number of considerations. These included the fact that the correct number was displayed prominently elsewhere (including on the back of the leaflet), and because the rest of the information on the leaflet was correct and still performed its purpose of providing advice on what to do in advance of and during a freeze thaw. It was considered that reprinting the leaflets would not represent best value for money, but immediate action was taken to ensure the online version of the leaflet was corrected and the right number will appear on any future prints. As the incorrect number is not operational, no cost would be incurred by anyone using it.

Asbestos Cement Water Mains

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 5691/11-15, what plans there are to replace these water mains.
(AQW 6081/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that, as the use of asbestos cement water mains for the supply of drinking water is not a health concern, there is no specific programme to replace them. Asbestos cement water mains will be replaced progressively as part of NIW's ongoing Water Mains Rehabilitation Programme. Decisions on mains replacement are taken on the basis of normal serviceability criteria such as water quality, the number of burst mains per kilometre, low water pressure or the number of interruptions to the supply to customers.

Asbestos Cement Water Pipes

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development what investigations his Department has undertaken into the health implications of asbestos cement water pipes.
(AQW 6082/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the use of asbestos cement pipe work for the distribution of drinking water has been widely researched by the World Health organisation (WHO). Studies carried out by WHO in 1993, 1996, 1998 and 2004 concluded that whilst asbestos is a known human carcinogen by the inhalation route, available epidemiological studies do not support the hypothesis that an increased cancer risk is associated with the ingestion of asbestos in drinking water. WHO has concluded there is no consistent, convincing evidence that ingested asbestos is hazardous to health and there are therefore no guideline values for asbestos in drinking water.

The health concerns regarding asbestos cement pipes are related to occupational exposure during their manufacture, installation and disposal and these are covered by industry regulations. Any work undertaken by NIW staff on asbestos cement pipe work is in accordance with legislative requirements and associated Health and Safety guidance. NIW employs a 'Safe System of Work' in line with industry practice and is confident that employees are not being put at risk whilst working with these pipes.

Department for Social Development

Civil Servants: Relocation

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 2169/11-15, why some Derry-based Civil Servants working in Belfast have been refused transfer to the state retirement pension service, when Belfast-based Civil Servants who are being relocated to Derry to fill vacancies are receiving travel and accommodation expenses for up to three years.
(AQW 5013/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The Human Resources aspects of the relocation of State Pension Branch are being delivered under an agreed Recruitment, Training and Redeployment Strategy. The current position is that for those phases of the recruitment process which are complete, no member of staff who currently works in Belfast, whether or not they live in Londonderry, and who has applied for a relocated post has been refused.

For the vast majority of staff who are transferring to State Pension Branch as part of the current recruitment process, the relocation to Londonderry will actually represent a saving in terms of their travelling expenses and travelling time. On that basis, and because all the moves are voluntary, the Department does not anticipate that any accommodation expenses or enduring travelling costs allowances will be payable as a result of this exercise.

In the period running up to the relocation staff will be based in Belfast. During this period some staff not currently based in Greater Belfast may incur additional travelling costs and, if they meet the relevant qualifying conditions, might qualify for an element of financial support under the Excess Fares Allowance. It is anticipated that any allowance will cease once the branch and its staff transfer to the new location in Londonderry in Spring 2012.

West Belfast: Spend by the Department for Social Development

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development to detail his Department's, and its arm's-length bodies', spend in the West Belfast constituency in each of the last three years; and the proposed spend for each year until 2015.
(AQW 5311/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below provides a breakdown of my Department's and its arm's-length bodies' spend in the West Belfast constituency in each of the last three years plus the budget in respect of the current year:

2008/09 Spend (£m)	2009/10 Spend (£m)	2010/11 Spend (£m)	2011/12 Budget (£m)
55.24	64.97	32.77	43.81

The above details include costs in respect of the Social Security Agency's Jobs & Benefits Offices at Kennedy Centre, Falls Road, Andersonstown and also the Belfast West & Lisburn District Support Office but does not include costs for Department for Employment & Learning staff based in the Jobs & Benefits Offices. Details in respect of Housing Executive offices in West Belfast and Dairy Farm District are also included, although the final spend will depend upon the necessary approvals being secured and valid claims being submitted, particularly in relation to the Social Housing Development Programme.

It is not possible at this early stage to determine proposed spend up to 2015 in West Belfast as many factors including, for example, Welfare Reform changes such as the introduction of Universal Credit and Social Fund Reform and other budgetary considerations will influence spend in all areas. It should be noted however, that all schemes will be subject to funding and the necessary approval processes being completed.

Pension Credit

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 4313/11-15, how and when the qualification age for the Guarantee Credit element of pension credit will gradually rise from age 60 to 65; and how his Department intends to communicate these changes to those affected.
(AQW 5382/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Pension Credit is a means tested benefit for persons of state retirement age. It is a non-contributory, non taxable benefit made up of two components, Guaranteed Credit and Savings Credit.

The State Pension age for women is gradually increasing to 65, to match the State Pension age for men. The minimum age to qualify for Guarantee Credit component of Pension Credit for both men and women is also gradually rising from age 60 to 65. The minimum age for the Savings Credit component is 65.

Under existing legislation the changes began to increase from 60 in April 2010 and will increase women's State Pension age to 65 between April 2010 and April 2020. This was announced in1993 and provided for in the Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

The Pensions Act 2011 will bring forward the increase in the State Pension Age in Great Britain to November 2018. In line with the principle of parity, it is anticipated that corresponding proposals will be introduced in Northern Ireland in January 2012.

The increases will be phased in so that people whose State Pension age increases the most have a longer notice period. The Department will advise those affected at the earliest opportunity. It is anticipated that a direct mailing exercise will be undertaken to communicate the changes. Paper and web-based information products such as the NI direct website are being updated along with the State Pension Forecasting service.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development how many people decided not to accept a Winter Fuel Payment in each of the last three years.
(AQW 5472/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is not available.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development to provide a breakdown of the £140 million spend on Neighbourhood Renewal areas in each of the last seven years.
(AQW 5538/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Actual expenditure on Neighbourhood Renewal in each of the last 7 years for this Department is as set out in the following table.

	2004/05	**2005/06**	**2006/07**	**2007/08**	**2008/09**	**2009/10**	**2010/11**	**Total**
Amount (m)	2.92	7.88	16.74	22.08	25.45	27.39	21.28	123.74

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the level of funding that has been allocated to capital projects as part of Neighbourhood Renewal Schemes in each of the next three years; and whether any of the funding has been allocated to projects in the Foyle area.
(AQW 5554/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The following table sets out the level of capital funding allocated to Neighbourhood Renewal schemes in the next 3 years.

	2012/13	**2013/14**	**2014/15**
Amount (£m)	£6.0	£8.0	£8.0

As North West Development Office Neighbourhood Renewal budgets have not been finalised for the next three years, no information can be supplied in respect to capital projects in the Foyle area. When budget allocations have been finalised, funding for capital projects will be informed by the priorities identified in the Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans.

Employment and Support Allowance: Work Capability Assessments

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number of Work Capability Assessments that have been carried out in each constituency, in each of the last three years; and of these how many people (a) passed; (b) failed; and (c) appealed the assessment; and (ii) on what date the first appeal was lodged.
(AQW 5556/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

(i) The Work Capability Assessment was introduced in October 2008 to determine eligibility to Employment and Support Allowance. The information requested is not available by parliamentary constituency. The table below provides details of the number of Work Capability Assessments carried out in each of the past three years since October 2008:

Year	WCA Outcomes
October 2008-2009	742
2009-2010	12,924
2010-2011	16,709
April 2011- November 2011	19,524
Total	**49,899**

a) 22,291 customers have been allowed Employment and Support Allowance following a Work Capability Assessment.

b) 27,608 customers have been disallowed Employment and Support Allowance following a Work Capability Assessment.

c) 15,702 customers have appealed being disallowed Employment and Support Allowance for not having limited capability for work:

(ii) The first appeal was received on 22 January 2009.

DSD: Information Service

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the current (i) number; and (ii) annual cost of staff employed in his Department's Information Service.
(AQW 5563/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The current number of staff employed in the Department's Information Service is 20 and the approximate annual cost is £635,084.

Portrush Harbour

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the further progress that could be made in improving the Portrush Harbour area either as part of the town Masterplan, or in addition to it.
(AQW 5566/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The extension and development of Portrush harbour was one of the proposals outlined in the Portrush Western Peninsula Strategy published in August 2007. Further development in this area could make a very significant contribution to the regeneration of the town as a whole.

My Department is working in partnership with Coleraine Borough Council to deliver a number of the proposals outlined in the Portrush Western Peninsula Strategy. The recent establishment of a local development group involving private sector and community stakeholders interested in the regeneration of the town will strengthen existing partnership arrangements between the Council and my Department. The development of the harbour is one of our highest priorities for Portrush and a number of technical studies are underway to test the feasibility of various options for redevelopment.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on PricewaterhouseCoopers' report on the Fundamental Review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive,
(AQW 5590/11-15)

Mr McCausland: PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) has completed an independent review of the Housing Executive. Their report contains a number of proposals and recommendations, I have asked that they discuss their proposals with key stakeholders in the Housing Sector and provide me with feedback on any issues or concerns raised. I have made no decisions yet on the way forward, however I can assure you that I will carefully consider every issue including any impact on staff and I am determined that any proposals I bring forward, which will be subject to full consultation, will be for the benefit of tenants and the citizens of Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive: Economy 7 Heating

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department has any plans to replace Economy 7 heating with Economy 10 heating in Housing Executive properties.
(AQW 5591/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As there is no Economy 10 tariff available in Northern Ireland, this is a matter outside the scope of the Housing Executive.

Civil Servants: Relocation

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many civil servants, outside of the Social Security Agency, will need to be transferred to the Pension Service in Londonderry.
(AQW 5665/11-15)

Mr McCausland: To date 7 DSD staff from outside of the Social Security Agency (SSA) have transferred to State Pensions with a further 11 staff scheduled to take up posts between January and April 2012. The remaining posts have been advertised to staff across the Northern Ireland Civil Service via the Elective Transfer process. That process closed on 16 December 2011and the outcome in terms of numbers of successful applicants will be confirmed early in the New Year.

Welfare Reform

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development what steps his Department is taking to limit any negative impact of Welfare Reform on people with distinct needs and disabilities.
(AQW 5678/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In trying to assess the impacts across the Section 75 groupings, my Department issued an Equality Impact Assessment for consultation. We will be carefully considering all of the responses received and will publish our response early in the New Year.

In seeking to identify impacts, work is ongoing at present to develop a Policy Simulation Model (PSM) which will be used for scenario analysis. The PSM will produce outputs including the financial impacts on different demographic groups from policy changes to the benefits system.

Employment and Support Allowance: Work Capability Assessments

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development how many people he expects to attend a Work Capability Assessment between 2011 and 2014.
(AQW 5681/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Work Capability Assessment is used to assess functional capability for work for customers claiming Employment and Support Allowance and by those customers in receipt of Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance and Income Support (paid on the grounds of incapacity) who are having their claims reassessed.

The Work Capability Assessment includes completion of a questionnaire by the customer and a paper scrutiny of all available evidence by a trained healthcare professional to establish the customer's capability for work. Only those customers whose functional capability cannot be established at scrutiny will be required to undergo a face-to-face medical assessment.

While it is estimated that 76,000 existing Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance and Income Support (paid on the grounds of incapacity) customers will be reassessed and will undergo a Work Capability Assessment it is not possible to predict the number who will be required to attend a face to face assessment between now and 2014. In addition, it is not possible to determine the number of fresh claims that will be received for Employment and Support Allowance in that period.

Employment and Support Allowance

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to those claimants moving from Incapacity Benefit to Employment Support Allowance (i) what is the timescale for the completion of the changeover; (ii) how many claimants will this affect; and (iii) how many medical examinations will take place.
(AQW 5692/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The reassessment of customers in receipt of Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance and Income Support (paid on grounds of incapacity for work) commenced in February 2011 and is due to be completed by 5 April 2014. It is estimated that approximately 76,000 existing customers will be affected.

All customers undergoing reassessment will undergo a Work Capability Assessment. The assessment is used to assess functional capability for work. It includes completion of a questionnaire by the customer and a paper scrutiny of all available medical evidence by a trained healthcare professional to establish the customer's functional capability for work.

Only those customers whose functional capability cannot be established at scrutiny will be required to undergo a face-to-face medical assessment. At this time, it is not possible to provide an accurate figure of the number of customers who will have a face to face assessment until April 2014 as each case is assessed on the information provided on their medical questionnaire.

Employment and Support Allowance

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the medical examinations for claimants moving from Incapacity Benefit to Employment Support Allowance (i) how much notice of an appointment is given; (ii) how long each examination is expected to last; (iii) how long claimants should be expected to wait on the day of their appointment; and (iv) what action is taken if delays occur.
(AQW 5693/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

(i) Customers receive a minimum of 7 days notice of their appointment unless an earlier date is mutually agreed.

(ii) There is no set time limit for the length of an assessment. This depends upon the individual case including the type and nature of medical conditions. Time with the health care professional is usually between 20 minutes and 60 minutes.

(iii) The aim is to see customers within 10 minutes of their appointment time, but many customers are seen before this and have no waiting time.

(iv) Receptionists will keep customers advised of any waiting time and keep them updated. If the delay is prolonged, explanations are provided and the customer will have the opportunity to rearrange their appointment and travel expenses will be paid.

Housing

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) how much funding was allocated for new build housing in the current financial year; (ii) how many units were planned within the allocation of funding; (iii) how many units are expected to be completed; and (iv) what is the projected underspend.
(AQW 5694/11-15)

Mr McCausland: This year, 2011/12, a gross programme of 1973 units has been developed that could deliver up to 1400 new homes. A total of £142.6 million has been allocated to deliver this new housing and the Housing Executive, who manage the programme on behalf of my Department are not forecasting any under spend at this time.

Social Housing Development Programme

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development how many firms were invited to tender for new build projects in this financial year; and what tender criteria were used.
(AQW 5695/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In procuring construction works under the Social Housing Development Programme housing associations must comply with the requirements of the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 and as a condition of Housing Association Grant comply with Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy. In so doing Associations must publicly advertise all opportunities to carry out construction works with a value exceeding £30k. Those with a value exceeding the current EU Threshold of £3.927m must be advertised in the Official Journal of the European Union. In meeting this requirement associations are inviting all construction firms, which meet pre-determined selection criteria, to tender for the works. Selection criteria which are project specific examines, amongst other things, the capacity and capability of the tenderer, including previous experience, to perform the contract, will be project specific.

Housing Executive Properties: Lagged Water Pipes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether the Housing Executive has identified whether all of its housing stock has lagged water pipes to prevent the pipes from bursting.
(AQW 5700/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive is satisfied that the vast majority of its properties have lagged pipes. However, there may be a small number of properties where a pipe has not been lagged or the lagging needs to be replaced. To address this they issued instructions to their contractors to double check that all pipes are lagged when they are carrying out work to their properties through both planned maintenance schemes and response maintenance requests. Any issues are brought to the Housing Executive's attention and appropriate action is taken. Additionally when their District Maintenance staff inspect properties after response maintenance work they check whether pipes in the property are lagged and take appropriate action to remedy where necessary. The instances where work has been required to provide lagging have been minimal.

Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings Scheme

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 4525/11-15, to detail the total cost of housing the Security Force personnel in each year; and the number of properties purchased through Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings Scheme in each constituency.
(AQW 5725/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not hold information on the total cost of housing the Security Forces personnel.

During the period 1 November 2008 to 31 October 2011 the Housing Executive purchased 81 properties through the Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings (SPED) scheme. Of these, 44 were owned by Security Force Personnel. The total cost of purchasing the properties and a breakdown of the properties purchased is as follows:-

- 01/11/2008 – 31/10/2009: 11 properties at a total cost of £2.692m
- 01/11/2009 – 31/10/2010: 19 properties at a total cost of £4.032m
- 01/11/2010 – 31/10/2011: 14 properties at a total cost of £2.898m

The information has not been provided by constituency on the basis of the confidentiality of the SPED scheme.

Carer's Allowance

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in each constituency are in receipt of Carer's Allowance. **(AQW 5757/11-15)**

Mr McCausland: The number of Carers Allowance recipients by Assembly constituency area is set out in the table below. Due to system configuration these figures are rounded to the nearest ten.

Assembly Constituency Area	Number of Recipients
Belfast East	1,440
Belfast North	2,720
Belfast South	1,250
Belfast West	3,710
East Antrim	1,170
East Londonderry	1,850
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	1,730
Foyle	2,800
Lagan Valley	1,240
Mid Ulster	2,130
Newry And Armagh	2,410
North Antrim	1,560
North Down	930
South Antrim	1,280
South Down	2,170
Strangford	1,310
Upper Bann	2,300
West Tyrone	2,250
Unknown	280
Total	**34,530**

Data source MIDAS/GMS scans May 2011

Bloomfield Estate, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether the pensioners' bungalows in the Bloomfield Estate, Bangor, will be included in the plans to install double glazing in Housing Executive properties, under the draft Programme for Government. **(AQW 5794/11-15)**

Mr McCausland: As a number of double glazing schemes were carried out prior to the introduction of computerised recording systems the Housing Executive's records on the level of double glazing in its stock is incomplete. However, it is estimated that approximately 50% of the stock already has some degree of double glazing.

The Housing Executive currently installs double glazing as part of its External Cyclical Maintenance programme. Extra funding secured through the monitoring round has enabled an increase in this activity. The Housing Executive is working to identify those

additional properties which still require double glazing. Once this information is available, as required in the draft Programme for Government, by March 2012 it will prepare a programme for the installation of double glazing to all Housing Executive homes by the end of 2015.

Barnagh Park, Donaghadee

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what plans his Department has to refurbish the flats at Barnagh Park, Donaghadee.
(AQW 5795/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The flats at Barnagh Park, Donaghadee were built in 1991 and had External Cyclical Maintenance works carried out in 2004/05. Gas heating systems were installed in 2006. The flats are included in a kitchen replacement scheme programmed for 2012/13 and further external works are programmed for the next two financial years, subject to available funding.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance.
(AQW 5833/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There were 187,951 recipients of Disability Living Allowance at 27 November 2011, the most recent figure available.

Housing Executive Properties: Double Glazing

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development which areas in North Down might benefit from the double glazing installation proposed in the draft Programme for Government.
(AQW 5849/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as a number of double glazing schemes were carried out prior to the introduction of computerised recording systems and therefore the Housing Executive's records on the level of double glazing in its stock is incomplete. However, it is estimated that approximately 50% of the stock already has some degree of double glazing.

The Housing Executive currently installs double glazing as part of its External Cyclical Maintenance programme. Extra funding secured through the monitoring round has enabled an increase in this activity. The Housing Executive is working to identify those additional properties which still require double glazing. Once this information is available, as required in the draft Programme for Government, by March 2012 it will prepare a programme for the installation of glazing to all Housing Executive homes by the end of 2015.

All Housing Executive dwellings in North Down which currently have single glazing will benefit from these proposals.

Kilclief Gardens and Ballynoe Gardens, Kilcooley

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the refurbishment of the flats at Kilclief Gardens and Ballynoe Gardens, Kilcooley.
(AQW 5853/11-15)

Mr McCausland: An Economic Appraisal detailing the options for these homes is currently being finalised by the Housing Executive.

I expect that work to complete in the coming weeks and I expect to make an announcement shortly after that is complete.

Employment and Support Allowance and Incapacity Benefit Allowance: Appeals

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many Employment Support Allowance and Incapacity Benefit Allowance decisions were appealed; and (ii) how many appeal decisions found in favour of the appellants, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 5957/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is set out in the table below:

Year	Appeals received	Appeals upheld in customer favour
2008-2009	3,331	930
2009-10	6,784	1,644
2010-11	7,414	1,804
April 2011-November 2011	6,016	1,424

Year	Appeals received	Appeals upheld in customer favour
Total	**23,545**	**5,802**

Employment and Support Allowance: Medical Assessments

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development what mechanisms are in place to ensure consistency in the medical assessments for Employment Support Allowance claimants; and what training is provided for those carrying out the assessments.
(AQW 5958/11-15)

Mr McCausland: All Employment and Support Allowance customers are subject to the Work Capability Assessment which may include a Work Capability Medical Assessment. Medical assessments are carried out on behalf of the Social Security Agency by Healthcare Professionals employed by Atos which are subject to monthly audits of completed assessments. These are reported to the Agency Health Assessment Advisor who is responsible for reviewing the quality and consistency of medical assessments.

A training programme is provided for all Healthcare Professionals employed to undertake medical assessments for Employment and Support Allowance. Following training, all assessments carried out by the new Health Care Professionals are audited to ensure they are of a consistent quality and standard. A training needs analysis for all Health Care Professionals is completed on a yearly basis to enable identification of training needs and to inform ongoing training.

Housing Executive: Health and Safety Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what new health and safety schemes are planned for the North Down area in the remainder of this financial year.
(AQW 5973/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I assume the Member is referring to Housing Executive schemes. The Housing Executive does not have any health and safety schemes planned for North Down in the remainder of this financial year.

Housing Executive

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister for Social Development, with regard to PricewaterhouseCoopers' Report on the Fundamental Review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, for his assessment of (i) whether the review was fundamental in its reach; (ii) the recommendation to establish an Independent Housing Regulator; (iii) who will benefit from the handing of the power to set rental rates to an Independent Housing Regulator; and (iv) whether the review satisfies equality and rural proofing requirements.
(AQW 6018/11-15)

Mr McCausland: PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) has completed an independent review of the Housing Executive. Their report contains a number of proposals and recommendations, I have asked that they discuss their proposals with key stakeholders in the Housing Sector and provide me with feedback on any issues or concerns raised. I have made no decisions yet on the way forward, however I can assure you that I will carefully consider every issue including any impact on staff and I am determined that any proposals I bring forward, which will be subject to full consultation, will be for the benefit of tenants and the citizens of Northern Ireland.

Employment and Support Allowance: Work Capability Assessments

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Social Development, for each of the last 12 months, to detail (i) the percentage of claimants who undertook a Work Capability Assessment for Employment and Support Allowance which resulted in a successful outcome; (ii) how many claimants from the Foyle constituency were awarded zero points in their assessment; and (iii) the success rate of appeals since the assessments have been carried out by ATOS Healthcare.
(AQW 6080/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

i) Details of the percentage of claimants who undertook a Work Capability Assessment for Employment and Support Allowance which resulted in a successful outcome, in each of the last 12 months, are set out in the table below:

Month	WCA success rate
December 2010	41%
January 2011	46%
February 2011	59%
March 2011	51%
April 2011	52%

Month	WCA success rate
May 2011	37%
June 2011	46%
July 2011	58%
August 2011	48%
September 2011	58%
October 2011	62%
November 2011	50%
Average	51%

ii) The information requested is not available by Parliamentary constituency.

iii) It is not possible to provide information in the format requested as the management information system does not differentiate between customers who have appealed being deemed 'fit for work' having been examined by ATOS Healthcare and those who have been deemed fit for work before ATOS Healthcare took over on 20 June 2011.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Northern Ireland Assembly: Secretariat Staff Complement

Mr Beggs asked the Assembly Commission to provide an update on its target to reduce the secretariat staff complement to 375. **(AQO 968/11-15)**

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): A reduction in staff numbers over the four year period of the Comprehensive Spending Review is planned and it is anticipated that this reduction will be achieved though the control of vacancies and through natural wastage. At present, a freeze on external recruitment is in place.

At the 1st April 2011, the number of staff in post in the Assembly Secretariat was 409.5 Full Time Equivalents staff. As of the 1st December 2011, that number has reduced to 397.1 which includes 4.3 FTE agency workers and 3 on attachment from other organisations.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 6 January 2012

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation

Mr Craig asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on progress in making public appointments to the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation.
(AQO 610/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): A public appointment process to select a chairperson and up to six members for the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation is under way. We cannot comment in detail about the process, as it is ongoing.

The regeneration of the site has the potential to act as a social and economic generator, in line with our commitment to maximise the economic, historical and reconciliation potential of the Maze/Long Kesh site. Initial development of the two anchor projects will provide a catalyst to attract further investment and, we hope, thousands of jobs.

Assembly Questions: Cost of Answering

Mr F McCann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an estimate of the average cost to their Department to respond to written and oral Assembly Questions tabled by Jim Allister MLA, since May 2011.
(AQW 4663/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM does not currently estimate the cost of answering Assembly Questions, but we are investigating the possibility of doing so.

Winter Fuel Allowance

Mr Elliott asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the rationale used to determine eligibility for the one-off fuel allowance payment; (ii) whether consideration was given to families with disabled children; and (iii) why these families are not eligible.
(AQW 5859/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Social Protection Fund was established by the Executive in March 2011 to mitigate the impact of the financial cuts on the most vulnerable in our society.

Acknowledging that exceptional circumstances existed in relation to vulnerable individuals as a result of the impact of increased household energy costs, including on those who are already likely to experience high levels of fuel poverty, the Executive identified the delivery of a Winter Poverty Payment Scheme as the key priority this year for the Social Protection Fund.

When considering who would qualify for the associated payments, we sought to target those individuals and groups who it was felt would be most vulnerable during the cold winter months and, with this in mind, identified those on low income, including older people and individuals on means tested benefits. It was also felt that cancer patients suffer from a particular set of circumstances which meant that they were also deemed as eligible for payment.

The Executive is committed to supporting the most vulnerable in our society and to providing assistance to those in greatest need.

We will continue to monitor and assess who, and how best to provide support from the Social Protection Fund in the coming years.

Winter Fuel Allowance

Mr P Ramsey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what consideration was given to including people with disabilities in the extension of the Winter Fuel Allowance.
(AQW 5868/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Social Protection Fund was established by the Executive in March 2011 to mitigate the impact of the financial cuts on the most vulnerable in our society.

Acknowledging that exceptional circumstances existed in relation to vulnerable individuals as a result of the impact of increased household energy costs, including on those who are already likely to experience high levels of fuel poverty, the Executive identified the delivery of a Winter Poverty Payment Scheme as the key priority this year for the Social Protection Fund.

When considering who would qualify for the associated payments, we sought to target those individuals and groups who it was felt would be most vulnerable during the cold winter months and, with this in mind, identified those on low income, including older people and individuals on means tested benefits. It was also felt that cancer patients suffer from a particular set of circumstances which meant that they were also deemed as eligible for payment.

The Executive is committed to supporting the most vulnerable in our society and to providing assistance to those in greatest need.

We will continue to monitor and assess who, and how best to provide support from the Social Protection Fund in the coming years.

Childcare Strategy

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister. pursuant to AQW 5080/11-15, whether funds not allocated to the Childcare Strategy by March 2011/12 will be re-profiled over the 2012-15 period
(AQW 5872/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We intend to make a case to DFP for re-profiling across the budget period to ensure that any resources which are not fully utilised this year are re-allocated to future years.

Childcare Strategy: Departmental Bids

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 5080/11-15, to detail the bids that were submitted by Departments for the £12 million allocated for the Childcare Strategy.
(AQW 5873/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Executive has allocated an additional £12 million to developing a strategy to deliver universal, sustainable and affordable childcare.

This is a long-term investment over the CSR period and the commitment is reflected in the immediate investment, this year, of an additional £322k, in response to departments' bids to implement a range of actions to improve childcare. These actions are summarised below:

Department	Childcare Development Proposals	2011/12 bid (£s)
DHSSPS	Additional funding to address registration and inspection backlogs.	250,000
OFMDFM	Additional funding to support South Armagh Childcare Consortium towards sustainability.	20,000
DCAL	Extension of Film Clubs to provide 2 hrs per week in 338 Extended Schools.	52,000
	Total 2011/12	**£322,000**

We remain committed to ensuring proper investment in childcare and are continuing to work with departments to develop proposals for early investment across government that will improve provision and support the development of the Childcare Strategy.

Ely Centre, Enniskillen

Lord Morrow asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they will consider elevating the status of the Ely Centre in Enniskillen to a Centre of Excellence, following its award by the Community Relations Council for 'Innovative Project of the Year 2011', for its work with carers of victims and survivors of terrorism in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone area.
(AQW 5904/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Whilst we applaud the Ely Centre winning the "Innovative Project of the Year 2011" award, along with all the other winners named by the Community Relations Council, it is not within the remit of OFMDFM to allocate a Centre of Excellence status.

Social Protection Fund

Mrs Hale asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what work their Department has done to utilise the Social Protection Fund to help alleviate poverty, particularly for older people.
(AQO 983/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: As stated within the draft Programme for Government, the Executive remains committed to tackling the problem of disadvantage here.

In addition to the Social Investment Fund, the Executive further proposed a Social Protection Fund to target vulnerable groups, such as older people, who continue to face hardship due to the current economic downturn and the continued increase in household fuel costs.

The Executive has subsequently agreed to prioritise fuel poverty through this fund and agreed that the £20 million budget would contribute towards a fuel allowance scheme, distributed through DSD and DHSSPS.

Among those who will benefit from the scheme will be those pensioners who are in receipt of State Pension Credit during the qualifying period 12 – 18 December 2011.

Children and Young People: Integrated Services

Mr Storey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what work thier Department has carried out, in conjunction with the Department of Education, in relation to the provision of integrated services for children and young people.
(AQW 5984/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: This Department through the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People, of which the Department of Education (DE) is a key participant, drives forward cross-departmental issues that impact on children and young people.

There are currently two Sub groups led by the Department of Education which report to the Ministerial Sub-Committee, which were commissioned to look specifically at improving delivery for children in the areas of Early Years and Special Educational Needs. DE also collaborated with this Department in developing and taking forward the 2008-11 Children and Young People's Action Plan, which identified key cross-departmental actions to progress the outcomes of the Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People.

We are currently in the process of developing a new Action Plan under the Children and Young People's Strategy and we will be working closely with DE in taking this forward.

Queen's University Belfast: 'Barriers to Effective Government Delivery for Children in Northern Ireland'

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of Queen's University report 'Barriers to Effective Government Delivery for Children in Northern Ireland' commissioned by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People which found (i) concern in relation to the closure of their Departments Children and Young People's Unit; (ii) inadequate training on children's rights for officials; (iii) limited evidence of consultation responses impacting final policy and strategies; and (iv) significant delay between conception and implementation of policy and strategies.
(AQW 5990/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The findings of this report raise interesting points and we welcome its contribution to this important discussion.

We would like to reiterate that the restructuring of this Department has not led to the weakening of our commitment to children and young people. There is a dedicated policy lead for children and young people with a supporting team to take forward the work in relation to this area.

Officials within the Department and indeed, throughout the NI Civil Service, have the opportunity to identify training needs in discussion with line management and arrange for them to be addressed via a variety of sources. We are aware that there are specific needs around the area of children's rights, and officials will be considering whether the training currently available continues to meet these needs.

The recommendations informed by public consultations will be thoroughly analysed and robustly tested, and, if necessary, policy will be revised. We are reviewing the current action plan and an analysis of the progress being made against our 10 year Strategy for Children and Young People is being carried out, which will inform our focus going forward.

Work is also ongoing to revise the governance structures around the 10 year Strategy and related policy. Proposals will be discussed with the Ministerial Sub-Committee in early January. Our emphasis will be on monitoring progress of actions periodically throughout the time span of the plan/strategy.

Child Poverty

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many children are currently in child poverty, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 6002/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We do not hold the information in the format requested.

The table below outlines the number and percentage of children in poverty here by local government district.

The data is taken from the Households below Average Income Report 2009/10. Relative poverty refers to those living in households below 60% of the median UK income before housing costs (BHC). The data are the latest estimates based on survey data.

Percentage of children in poverty by Local Government District

Percentage of children	**Source: FRS 2009/10**	
Local Government District (3-year average)	**Income Below median 60%**	**All children (thousands)**
Antrim	25	12.3
Ards	14	18.7
Armagh	16	13.4
Ballymena	11	11.4
Ballymoney	20	8.1
Banbridge	24	11.7
Belfast	30	54.1
Carrickfergus	24	8.5
Castlereagh	6	14.6
Coleraine	30	14.4
Craigavon	20	20.0
Down	25	23.1
Dungannon	29	15.1
Fermanagh	32	13.3
Limavady	34	7.8
Lisburn	19	30.4
Derry	44	30.1
Newry & Mourne	33	25.2
Newtownabbey	26	17.7
North Down	14	22.0
Cookstown & Magherafelt[1]	31	22.7
Larne & Moyle[1]	29	9.5
Omagh & Strabane[1]	28	26.5
All children[2]	**28**	**434.7**

Note:

1 Two LGDS combined due to sample size requirements

2 The total for NI is shown for the 2009/10 survey year only and not three year averages

Source: DSD, Households Below Average Income, 2009/10 Report, Table 4.9(BHC): p78

Childcare Strategy

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 5080/11-15, to detail the projects that have been successful, including the costings attached to each project.
(AQW 6032/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Over the CSR period, the Executive has allocated an additional £12 million to developing a strategy to deliver universal, sustainable and affordable childcare.

This is a long term investment and the commitment is reflected in the immediate provision, this year, of £322k, out of the additional allocation to childcare. All current departmental bids have been met, thereby enabling a range of actions to improve childcare. These actions and the additional funding allocated are summarised below:

Department	Childcare Development Proposals	2011/12 bid (£s)
DHSSPS	Additional funding to address registration and inspection backlogs.	250,000
OFMDFM	Additional funding to support South Armagh Childcare Consortium towards sustainability.	20,000
DCAL	Extension of Film Clubs to provide 2hrs per week in 338 Extended Schools.	52,000
	Total 2011/12	**£322,000**

Social Protection Fund

Mr Kinahan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) how they intend to use the Social Protection Fund to help individuals and families facing hardship in the current economic recession, excluding the Winter Fuel Allowance; and (ii) to confirm what proportion of the Social Protection Fund's resources for 2010/11 were allocated to the Winter Fuel Allowance.
(AQW 6087/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Executive proposed a Social Protection Fund (SPF) to mitigate the impact of the financial cuts on the most vulnerable in our society.

Acknowledging that exceptional circumstances existed in relation to vulnerable individuals as a result of the impact of increased household energy costs, including on those who are already likely to experience high levels of fuel poverty, the Executive subsequently identified the delivery of a Winter Poverty Payment Scheme as the key priority this year for the Social Protection Fund.

The Executive further agreed that the full £20 million SPF budget would be used to contribute towards the Winter Poverty Payment Scheme which will be distributed through DSD and DHSSPS.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Agrifood: InterTradeIreland Report

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the Agri-Food: A Study for Cross-Border Cooperation report; and whether she will implement its recommendations.
(AQW 5767/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): My Department has not yet received the final report from InterTrade Ireland (ITI) therefore I am not in a position to offer assessment of its content.

My Department had commented on earlier drafts and highlighted DARD's 'Focus on Food Strategy' commitments, resource implications, existing animal health collaboration and similarities between the 'Focus on Food' and ITI strategy documents.

DARD were advised in July 2010 by ITI that the report was with their Sponsor Departments for comment and had not yet been signed off. Since that time there has been no further correspondence from ITI regarding the report status.

Slurry or Chicken Litter: Water Pollution and Malodour

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what actions her Department takes when there is a substantive risk of water pollution and malodour arising from improperly managed slurry or chicken litter.
(AQW 5938/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department provides advice for farmers in the DARD Code of Good Agricultural Practice for the Prevention of Pollution of Water, Air and Soil which was published in 2008.

The Code contains information on the best management practices that farmers should adopt in order to minimize the risk of causing pollution to air, soil and water from agricultural practices. This includes advice on storing and spreading slurry and manures to minimise the risk of polluting waterways. The Code also provides guidance on reducing odour arising from the management of slurry and manures and encourages practices to reduce any adverse impact on neighbouring houses or populated areas.

In addition, my Department, jointly with the Department of the Environment, has implemented the Nitrates Action Programme Regulations which apply to all farms across the north of Ireland. These Regulations include controls on the storage and spreading of slurry and manures to promote best practice and prevent water pollution.

My Department provides agri-environment training for farmers through the Farm Advisory System. The College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) run training workshops relating to water quality on farms including the Nitrates and Phosphorus Regulations, Nutrient Management Planning and Dealing with Farm Wastes.

My Department is also providing grant aid to encourage farmers to invest in advanced slurry spreading systems through the Manure Efficiency Technology Scheme (METS). These systems significantly reduce the odour from spreading operations and provide a range of other environmental and productive benefits.

The NI Environment Agency (NIEA) is responsible for investigating water pollution incidents and enforcement of the Nitrates Action Programme Regulations. On referral from NIEA, the Countryside Management Unit within my Department offers pollution control advice to farmers following a farm related pollution incident. This is designed to increase farmer competence in handling slurry, manure and farm wastes, thereby minimising the possibility of a further pollution incident.

Local Councils have certain powers relating to the control of odour from agriculture related activities. Therefore any concerns about odour from the management of slurry and manures can be reported to the Environmental Health Department of the relevant Local Council for investigation.

Capital Grant Support to Farmers

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what level of capital grant support her Department has offered to farmers in each constituency, in each year since 2007.
(AQW 5955/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As information on my Department's expenditure on capital grants is not held on the basis of the question asked, it is not possible to respond in the format requested without incurring disproportionate costs.

However, I can advise that since 2007 my Department has provided capital grant funding of £147.5m to the farming industry.

Capacity Building Programme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline (i) her proposals for a Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist Capacity Building Programme, including when tenders will be invited for the delivery agents; (ii) the purpose of the programme; (iii) the budget for the programme; and (iv) the timescale for the delivery of the programme.
(AQW 6006/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: An Economic Appraisal is currently being completed on the provision of local rural community development services which includes specific proposals for services for protestant/unionist/loyalist rural communities. Until the Economic Appraisal is completed and approved by the Department of Finance and Personnel it is not possible to provide details of the proposals. Subject to the necessary approvals being obtained it is the intention that invitations to tender will issue in January 2012 with the aim of having contracts in place by April 2012.

Capacity Building Programme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of hubs that are envisaged under the proposed Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist Capacity Building Programme; and the area that will be covered by the hub responsible for the Ballymena area.
(AQW 6007/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: An Economic Appraisal is currently being completed on the provision of local rural community development services which includes specific proposals for services for protestant/unionist/loyalist rural communities. Until the Economic Appraisal is completed and approved by the Department of Finance and Personnel it is not possible to provide details of the proposals.

Capacity Building Programme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if an economic appraisal has been carried out in on the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist Capacity Building Programme, and if so, whether the results of the appraisal will be made available to the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development.
(AQW 6008/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: An Economic Appraisal is currently being completed on the provision of local rural community development services which includes specific proposals for services for protestant/unionist/loyalist rural communities. When the Economic Appraisal has been completed the results will be made available to the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development.

Food Strategy Board

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress has been made in recruiting members to the Food Strategy Board; and to detail the funding that has been allocated for the recruitment process.
(AQW 6015/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The recruitment arrangements for the establishment of the Food Strategy Board (FSB) are currently underway and the appointment of an independent Chair is expected early in the New Year.

My Department is working alongside DETI/InvestNI in making preparations for the appointment of members to the FSB. The job description and candidate application pack is being prepared and nominations to the Board will be sought in the course of the coming weeks.

FSB membership is an unpaid position and so any funding allocated to the recruitment process is related solely to recruitment advertising costs and these are being shared jointly with Invest NI from existing Departmental budgets. As the recruitment process for members of the FSB has not yet concluded, it is not possible to say at present what the final cost will be, however it is anticipated to be in the region of £3,000 to £5,000.

Flooding: Assistance for Residents at Risk

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, following the updating of Rivers Agency online flood maps to include predictions of risk, what further action she will take to assist residents whose homes may be affected by flooding.
(AQW 6058/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The updating of the online flood maps was undertaken to make as much up to date information available to the public as possible and to ensure that data covers the risks from rivers, the sea and surface water, as well as showing those areas for which historical flood information has been collated. In respect of action to assist residents whose homes may be affected by flooding my Department focuses on 3 keys areas, Prevention, Protection and Preparedness. Firstly, we aim to prevent damage from flooding by providing advice to the public and DOE Planning. This enables informed decisions to be taken which should avoid building in areas at risk from flooding. Secondly, we provide protection to existing property at flood risk through the ongoing maintenance of existing drainage and flood defences and where viable the construction of new defences. Thirdly, we prepare for flooding by working with key organisations to develop flood risk management plans and a co-ordinated response to flood events. The updated Flood Maps also provide information to the public who may be at risk because this understanding will enable them to be better prepared to react when a flood event occurs. I am convinced that by working together we can manage flood risk to reduce its impact on people, property and the environment.

DARD: Christmas Cards

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to list all the recipients of official departmental Christmas cards signed by her, or her predecessor, in each year since 2007.
(AQW 6091/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In 2011, I issued a total of 416 Departmental Christmas Cards. 381 were electronic cards and 35 hard copy cards. Prior to 2011, I was not appointed as Minister and therefore cannot provide information for previous years.

Due to the need to seek third party clearance to release personal information, and the disproportionate cost this would incur, I am unable to list all the recipients.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether her Department would consider commissioning a study to determine the impact that hydraulic fracturing might have on waterways, the angling industry and other water based activities.
(AQW 5837/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I understand that hydraulic fracturing is a relatively new process and, as such, its impacts on waterways, the angling industry and other water based activities are not yet known.

DCAL Inland Fisheries group is consulted on applications to DETI under section 11 of the Minerals Development Act (NI) 1969 administered by DETI.

DETI has recently established a shale gas forum to address the recent in and concerns about hydraulic fracturing. DCAL Inland Fisheries Group will be represented at the forum.

Salmon and Inland Fisheries Forum

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the current membership of the Salmon and Inland Fisheries Forum; (ii) their attendance record at meetings; and (iii) the representatives of her Department's Fisheries Division who are on the Forum, and the office and grade each representative holds.
(AQW 5915/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

(i)

Robert Murtland	Michael Crilly
Allan Kilgore	Jack Tisdall
Gary W Houston	Robert J Haughey
Patrick Close	Francis G Conlon

Patrick McNeill
Martin McNeill
John McWilliams
Dermot Curran
John Morton
Hugh Edward J Montgomery
David Laughlin
Paul Johnston
Mark P Horton

(ii) See attached sheet

(iii) There are no representatives of DCAL Inland Fisheries Group on the Forum.

(ii)

	Dec 2009	Jan 1010	Apr 2010	Jun 2010	Sept 2010	Dec 2010	Mar 2011	Jun 2011	Sept 2011
Robert Murtland	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended
Allan Killgore	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended	Apology	Apology	Apology	Apology
Gary W Houston	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended	Apology	Attended	Attended	Attended
Patrick Close	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended	Apology	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended
Patrick McNeill		Attended	Apology	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended
Martin McNeill	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended	Apology	Attended	Attended
John McWilliams					Attended	Apology	Attended	Attended	Apology
Dermot Curran	Apology			Apology					
John Morton					Attended	Apology	Attended	Apology	Apology
Michael Crilly	Attended	Attended	Attended	Apology	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended
Jack Tisdall	Attended	Attended	Apology	Apology	Attended		Attended	Attended	Attended
Robert J Haughey	Apology		Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended		Attended	Attended
Francis G Conlon	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended	Apology	Attended	Attended
Hugh E.J. Montgomery	Apology		Attended	Apology	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended	Attended
David Luughlin	Apology		Attended			Apology			Apology
Paul Johnston							Attended	Apology	Attended
Mark P Horton	Attended	Attended	Attended	Apology	Attended	Attended	Apology	Attended	Apology

County Antrim Net Fishery

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when the report on the genetic survey of the destinations of fish caught in the County Antrim Net Fishery will be made available to (i) MLAs; (ii) the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure; and (iii) the general public; and to outline any delays in publishing this report.
(AQW 5917/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The report on the genetic survey into the destinations of fish caught in the Co Antrim net fishery is part of the information being used to develop salmon conservation policy in the DCAL jurisdiction.

The Department is currently at an advanced stage in the policy development process and is awaiting further information on a number of matters.

I can confirm that the report on the survey will be made available to MLAs, the CAL Committee and the public in due course, but at this point I am unable to provide a definitive date for the publication of the report.

Nets: Licence Holders

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether a licence holder for nets, which are licensed by her Department, is legally responsible for the individual who operates the nets; and how her Department verifies that the licence holder operates the nets.
(AQW 5919/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Under Section 12 of the Fisheries Byelaws (NI) 2003, fishing licences (apart from those for recreational angling and drift nets) are valid only when used by the licence holder or his agent previously authorised in writing by him.

In the event of a drift net licence holder being unable to fish his net due to ill health, he may submit appropriate medical evidence, nominate an agent and the Department may authorise that person to take responsibility for the operation of that net for a specified period of time or the remainder of that fishing season.

In any case it is the licence holder or, in appropriate circumstances, his authorised agent who is responsible for any breach of fisheries legislation by the boat crew.

The Department verifies that the licence holder or his authorised agent is fishing the net by means of inspections by Fisheries Protection Officers when the nets are in operation.

Nets: Monitoring

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline her Department's procedures and protocols for monitoring the nets that are licensed by her Department.
(AQW 5920/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: DCAL Fisheries Protection staff undertake regular patrols, including evenings and weekends, on land and water, throughout the DCAL operational area. They also carry out intelligence led operations to detect, disrupt and deter those involved in illegal fishing activities.

On coming across a net Fisheries Protection Officers will check these to confirm that they comply with fisheries legislation. These checks include:

- the placement of the net, e.g. in relation to river mouths;
- it is being fished in season;
- it is of proper construction, i.e. not monofilament;
- it is properly marked;
- it is of the correct length and mesh size;
- any catch is that licensed to be taken.

Any nets that do not comply with the requirements are illegal and, if discovered, are subject to seizure by DCAL Fisheries Protection Officers.

Inland Fisheries: Inquiry

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in relation to the inquiry into Inland Fisheries carried out by the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure in 2001, for an update on the current position of recommendations (i) 3; (ii) 4; (iii) 6; (iv) 21; (v) 25; (vi) 44; (vii) 48; (viii) 51; (ix) 55; (x) 56; (xi) 57; (xii) 58; (xii) 59; (xiii) 60, in the Committee report.
(AQW 5921/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: With regard to the recommendations of the Inland Fisheries inquiry carried out by the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, I would provide the following updates. I would also point out that the inquiry was held ten years ago and many of the contexts in which recommendations were made have changed.

(i) The designation of conservation status is a matter for the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) in partnership with the Irish authorities.

(ii) NIEA is responsible for fish monitoring and recommendations for conservation.

(iii) Pollan are monitored as part of the triannual Erne survey and evidence has informed the decision to keep the pollan fishery closed. It has not yet been possible to fund a full survey in Lough Neagh but discussions are on-going on how this might be achieved.

(iv) The Department now has a Memorandum of Understanding in place with the NIEA to deal with pollution and fish kills. This covers the rescue of fish if feasible.

(v) The application of penalties by Courts in pollution cases is not a matter for DCAL.

(vi) The Department promotes the Public Angling Estate (PAE) and game and coarse angling in its jurisdiction through the website at www.nidirect.gov.uk/angling and attendance at angling shows in Great Britain, Ireland and Europe. Significant resources have been committed over the years to improving access, facilities and stocking of PAE waters. A report was produced by PWC in 2007 and can be accessed at www.dcalni.gov.uk/economic_impact_of_angling_final_report_july_2007.pdf

(vii) The Department continues to address fisheries protection issues with the development of the salmon management strategy which can be accessed at www.nasco.int/pdf/implementation_plans/IP_NIreland.pdf. The Department has also assumed responsibility for the enforcement of fisheries protection legislation since the abolition of the Fisheries Conservancy Board in June 2009.

(viii) An independent body to determine the ownership of fishing rights has not been established.

(ix) The salmon net buyout scheme was extremely successful in reducing the number of commercial coastal salmon nets from 55 to the current figure of 6. The scheme was fully funded by the public purse.

(x) This does not fall within DCAL's remit.

(xi) Salmon conservation measures have been kept under review and salmon conservation policy development is on-going and at an advanced stage. The ban on the sale of rod caught salmon has not been introduced.

(xii) The work carried out at the Bush Salmon Station continues and is of international importance. The Departments commits significant funding to commission the expertise of AFBI.

(xiii) It is now DCAL policy that Bush salmon are only used to try to restore salmon populations that have been demonstrably extirpated. Bush progeny are not used for the rehabilitation of declining populations.

(xiv) This has been superseded by the EU Eel Regulations 2007 and the development, approval and implementation of 3 Eel Management Plans covering the DCAL jurisdiction.

Libraries NI: e-Books Facility

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many people have used the e-books facility through the Libraries NI website since its introduction.
(AQW 5934/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Since its introduction in July 2011, 1,829 borrowers have used the e-books facility through the Libraries NI website.

Libraries NI: Facilities

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what measures her Department is taking to increase awareness of all of the facilities provided by Libraries NI.
(AQW 5935/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Operationally this is a matter for Libraries NI.

Libraries NI raises awareness of its services on an ongoing basis through its website, its social media presence (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube), through NI Direct and through the issue of press releases (on average 10 per week) as well as routine contact with local groups and organisations.

Promotional leaflets are available for a range of services and in addition it has a rolling programme of promoting specific services, libraries and events either to a target audience or the general public. Examples are contained in Annex A.

Annex A

Examples of measures taken by Libraries NI to increase awareness of Libraries NI facilities:

- Regular event posting in local newspapers.
- Letters to all primary schools.
- Publicity to launch eBooks.
- Open day at Cregagh Library for members of the public and similar in a number of other libraries.
- NI4Kids advertorial promoting Rhythm and Rhyme and Monkey See Monkey Do.
- Poster advertising on selected sites in shopping centres.
- Bus advertising in the North West.
- BBC Experience in Lurgan Library included hosting the Hugo Duncan Show.
- Participation in high profile branded events such as Adult Learners' Week, Silver Surfers Day.
- Working in partnership with other organisations and in doing so availing of their publicity channels as well as Libraries NI's e.g. arts events in partnership with local council.
- Promotion of the newly refurbished libraries through bus advertising.
- Participation in festivals and celebrations.

Libraries: Unpaid Fines

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many people are currently banned from borrowing books from libraries because of unpaid fines.
(AQW 5943/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The total number of borrowers in the last 2 years who currently have unpaid fines of £10 or more is 1,794. They are consequently banned from borrowing library books.

Salmon: Scientific Papers

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 5439 /11-15, to outline the actions her Department will now take in light of the scientific evidence that was presented.
(AQW 6010/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: DCAL will continue to work with stakeholders in an effort improve degraded freshwater habitat, minimise barriers to migration and manage exploitation of salmon in an effort to assist greater numbers of fish reach the open sea.

DCAL will also continue to commission research by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) on establishing conservation levels and identifying areas for habitat improvements.

The scientific evidence presented at the Salmon Summit will help to further inform the Department's on-going development of salmon conservation policy, which is currently at an advanced stage.

Conservation Limits: Moyola, Ballinderry, Agivey, Maine and Fane Rivers

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the (i) conservation limits; and (ii) the percentage compliance with the conservation limits in each of the last ten years in relation to the (a) Moyola; (b) Ballinderry; (c) Agivey; (d) Maine; and (e) Fane rivers.
(AQW 6022/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The River Maine is the only Salmon Management Strategy index river as referred to in the question. DCAL has been operating a fish counter on the River Maine since 2007.

(i) The River Maine conservation limit with regard to ova deposition ranges between 2,118,400 - 3,264,000. This equates to 964 - 1440 adult returning fish.

(ii) Compliance against Conservation Limit CL (%):

2007	2008	2009	2010
96.4%	170.2%	68.3%	60.7%

Analysis of data collected to determine conservation limit compliance in 2011 is ongoing.

Creative Industries Innovation Fund

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many projects are currently funded by the Creative Industries Innovation Fund.
(AQW 6033/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Forty two projects have been funded in 2011/2012.

The scheme has focused on Digital Content to date but will open to all sectors of the Creative Industries in January 2012.

DCAL: Christmas Cards

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to list all the recipients of official departmental Christmas cards signed by her, or her predecessor, in each year since 2007.
(AQW 6092/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have not issued any official departmental Christmas cards.

Department of Education

Sure Start: Killyman, Dungannon

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education whether he plans to extend the SureStart scheme for free childcare to include the Killyman area of Dungannon; and what options are available to parents in this area with children aged 3 years old and over to avail of free childcare.
(AQW 5726/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The main focus of Sure Start is to work with parents and young children from birth to age 4 to provide early education and support through the promotion of the child's physical, social, emotional and cognitive development. To enable a parent to attend a Sure Start course or activity, childcare may be provided but Sure Start does not offer free childcare to all parents.

There are no plans to extend Sure Start services to the Killyman ward. Current policy is that Sure Start services are targeted to at least the top 20% most disadvantaged wards. The Killyman ward does not come within this criterion. The draft Early Years 0-6 Strategy contained a commitment to seek to expand the reach of Sure Start and work has commenced on identifying the ward areas now falling within the top 25% most disadvantaged areas. The introduction of this and, indeed, the further extension of Sure Start will depend on the availability of additional resources. The Killyman ward is however outside the top 25%.

The Department of Education does not have policy responsibility for childcare. Junior Ministers, and OFMDFM are leading work on the development of a childcare strategy, through the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children & Young People.

Irish: Cost of Translations

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 5302/11-15, to detail the reason for the 60 percent increase in the cost of translating and publishing his Department's documents in Irish from 2009/10 to 2010/11.
(AQW 5884/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The expenditure for 2010/11, outlined in AQW 5302/11-15, includes the cost of printing resource files in English and Irish for teaching children with special educational needs as part of the SEN capacity building programme. This one-off printing cost amounted to £50,220.

Irish Language Officers

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 5302/11-15, what public advertisement was undertaken in relation to the employment of Irish Language Officers; and how many posts were advertised.
(AQW 5885/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A recruitment competition entitled Staff Officer (Irish Language) was advertised in the Belfast Telegraph, Irish News, News Letter, Lá Nua and Foinse in week commencing 31 March 2008. Following the competition, two candidates were appointed.

Irish Language Officers

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 5302/11-15, whether a business case was prepared for the employment of Irish Language Officers.
(AQW 5886/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There was no requirement to prepare a business case.

Schools: Average Class Sizes

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the average class size in (a) primary schools; and (b) post-primary schools; and (ii) whether the 85,000 empty desks provides an opportunity to reduce the average class size.
(AQW 5895/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: (i) (a) The average class size in primary schools was 23 pupils in 2011/12. This figure includes pupils in year 1 to 7 only and excludes pupils in special units.

(i) (b) Average class sizes for post-primary schools are not calculated, as numbers in classes may vary with subject.

(ii) The level of surplus provision across our schools provides, first and foremost, a major reason to take forward the work I announced on September 26, 2011. Area Planning will address the issue of surplus places by ensuring that the education provision in any area meets the needs, this will include examination of class sizes.

The Department of Education's policy is to keep classes for our youngest pupils at 30 or fewer. This policy covers Foundation and Key Stage 1 (Years 1-4). Beyond these requirements, it is a matter for the Board of Governors and Principal of each school to determine class sizes through the use of their delegated budgets taking account of their spending priorities and staffing complements.

Within all stages of a child's education in school, our focus is on supporting and promoting high quality teaching and learning and our school improvement policy is designed with this purpose in mind. There are no plans to lower the maximum class size limit of 30 at Foundation Stage or Key Stage 1 or to extend the limit to apply to other Key Stages not least because research evidence suggests that, except during the very early years, there is little correlation between class size and pupil outcomes. Rather the main factor in raising standards is high quality teaching supported by strong and effective leadership.

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment Exams: Languages

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many candidates sat the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment exams in (i) Irish; (ii) Ulster Scots; (iii) Polish; or (iv) any other language excluding English, in each of the last five years at (a) GCSE level; and (b) A Level.
(AQW 5914/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has invested in providing curricular resources to support Irish medium schools in delivering the revised curriculum and, through programmes such as Primary Languages Programme, giving primary schools the opportunity to explore the Irish language. This also extends to supporting those who choose to study in the medium of Irish being allowed to be examined and assessed in their language of choice, by recruiting appropriate experts in the language. Papers are translated into Irish if a request is made from an Irish Medium School or Unit.

The Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), does not currently translate any papers into Ulster Scots, Polish or any other language. Table 1 below, shows the number of papers translated into Irish each year for GCSE and A level papers.

Table 1: Number of papers translated into Irish over the last 5 years (GCSE and A-level papers)

Academic Year	GCSE	A Level
2006/07	109	61
2007/08	126	79
2008/09	139	92
2009/10	125	69
2010/11	105	61

Table 2 below shows the number of examination papers that were taken through the medium of Irish.

Table 2: Number of paper entries for examinations taken through the Medium of Irish for GCSE and GCE

Year	GCSE	GCE
2007	1,499	146
2008	1,637	121
2009	1,772	153
2010	1,865	172
2011	2,121	144

No students have entered any examinations with CCEA through the medium of Ulster Scots, Polish or any other language excluding English, in any of the last 5 years.

Schools: Mergers

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education whether there is a legal framework to allow a controlled school and a maintained school to merge.
(AQW 5932/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is possible for a controlled school and a maintained school to merge. However, the resulting new school must have either controlled or maintained status, as there is no provision for hybrid status. The legislative vehicle for such a merger would be a development proposal under Article 14 of the Education and Libraries (N I) Order 1986.

Dyslexia: Assistance

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Education how much each Education and Library Board spent on services to assist students with dyslexia in each of the last five years.
(AQW 5933/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have been advised by the Education and Library Boards as follows:-

	2006/07 £000	2007/08 £000	2008/09 £000	2009/10 £000	2010/11 £000
BELB	1,089	1,133	1,004	1,181	1,296
NEELB	1,412	1,660	1,779	1,741	1,692
SEELB	939	939	1,000	1,091	1,171
SELB	1,481	1,685	1,896	1,885	1,841
WELB	1,281	1,288	1,316	1,277	1,181

Schools: Transfer Brochure in Irish

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to outline the costs associated with the issuing of the transfer brochure in Irish to parents of children in P7.
(AQW 5944/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Each year the Department produces an advice leaflet advising parents of P7 children about the transfer procedure. My Department incurred expenditure of £184 this year in translating the English text into Irish so that the leaflet could issue in

the bilingual format required by current policy on Departmental publications. The cost of printing these leaflets and distributing them to Education and Library Boards was £3,879.

Primary Languages Programme

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Education to detail the schools which currently participate in the Primary Languages Programme. **(AQW 5951/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd: The 412 schools currently participating in the programme are detailed in the tables below by Education and Library Board Area and the language being taught.

School	ELB	Language
Bunscoil an tSléibhe Dhubibh, BELFAST	BELB	Spanish
Donegall Road Primary School, BELFAST	BELB	Spanish
Euston Street Primary School, BELFAST	BELB	Spanish
Fane Street Primary School, BELFAST	BELB	Spanish
Forge Integrated Primary School, BELFAST	BELB	Spanish
Glenwood Primary School, BELFAST	BELB	Spanish
Holy Family Primary School, BELFAST	BELB	Spanish
Holy Trinity Primary School, BELFAST	BELB	Spanish
Inchmarlo Prep, BELFAST	BELB	Spanish
Knocknagoney Primary School, BELFAST	BELB	Spanish
Malvern Primary School, BELFAST	BELB	Spanish
Mercy Primary School, BELFAST	BELB	Spanish
Nettlefield Primary School, BELFAST	BELB	Spanish
Orangefield Primary School BELFAST	BELB	Spanish
Seaview Primary School, BELFAST	BELB	Spanish
Star of the Sea Primary School, BELFAST	BELB	Spanish
St John the Baptist Primary School, BELFAST	BELB	Spanish
St Joseph's Primary School, BELFAST	BELB	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School, BELFAST	BELB	Spanish
St Michael's Primary School, BELFAST	BELB	Spanish
St Therese of Lisieux Primary School, BELFAST	BELB	Spanish
Taughmonagh Primary School, BELFAST	BELB	Spanish
Wheatfield Primary School, BELFAST	BELB	Spanish
Acorn Integrated Primary School, CARRICKFERGUS	NEELB	Spanish
Ampertaine Primary School, MAGHERA	NEELB	Spanish
Anahorish Primary School, TOOMEBRIDGE	NEELB	Spanish
Antrim Primary School ANTRIM	NEELB	Spanish
Armoy Primary School ARMOY	NEELB	Spanish
Ashgrove Primary School, NEWTOWNABBEY	NEELB	Spanish
Ballycarry Primary School BALLYCARRY	NEELB	Spanish
Ballycastle Controlled Integrated Primary School	NEELB	Spanish
Ballyhackett Primary School CASTLEROCK	NEELB	Spanish

School	ELB	Language
Ballyhenry Primary School GLENGORMLEY	NEELB	Spanish
Ballykeel Primary School BALLYMENA	NEELB	Spanish
Ballynure Primary School BALLYNURE	NEELB	Spanish
Ballysally Primary School BALLYSALLY	NEELB	Spanish
Broughshane Primary School BROUGHSHANE	NEELB	Spanish
Buick Memorial Primary School CULLYBACKEY	NEELB	Spanish
Bushmills Primary School BUSHMILLS	NEELB	Spanish
Carlane Primary School TOOMEBRIDGE	NEELB	Spanish
Carnalridge Primary School PORTRUSH	NEELB	Spanish
Carniny Primary School BALLYMENA	NEELB	Spanish
Carnmoney Primary School NEWTOWNABBEY	NEELB	Spanish
Carrickfergus Model Primary School	NEELB	Spanish
Castledawson Primary School CASTLEDAWSON	NEELB	Spanish
Castleroe Primary School COLERAINE	NEELB	Spanish
Corran Integrated Primary School LARNE	NEELB	Spanish
Creavery Primary School ANTRIM	NEELB	Spanish
Crumlin Primary School CRUMLIN	NEELB	Spanish
Culcrow Primary School, AGHADOWEY	NEELB	Spanish
Cullycapple Primary School, AGHADOWEY	NEELB	Spanish
Culnady Primary School, MAGHERA	NEELB	Spanish
Damhead Primary School, COLERAINE	NEELB	Spanish
Doagh Primary School DOAGH	NEELB	Spanish
Drumard Primary School, Tamlaght MAGHERA	NEELB	Spanish
Dunclug Primary School BALLYMENA	NEELB	Spanish
Duneane Primary School TOOMEBRIDGE	NEELB	Spanish
Earlview Primary School, New Mossley ANTRIM	NEELB	Spanish
Fourtowns Primary School AHOGHILL	NEELB	Spanish
Gaelscoil an Chaistil BALLYCASTLE	NEELB	Spanish
Gaelscoil Éanna, GLENGORMLEY	NEELB	Spanish
Gaelscoil na Speiríní DRAPERSTOWN	NEELB	Spanish
Garryduff Primary School BALLYMONEY	NEELB	Spanish
Glengormley Integrated Primary School	NEELB	Spanish
Glynn Primary School GLYNN	NEELB	Spanish
Gracehill Primary School GRACEHILL	NEELB	Spanish
Greenisland Primary School GREENISLAND	NEELB	Spanish
Groggan Primary School RANDALSTOWN	NEELB	Spanish
Hazelbank Primary School AUGHAFATTEN	NEELB	Spanish
Irish Society's Primary School MOUNTSANDEL	NEELB	Spanish

School	ELB	Language
Kells & Connor Primary School KELLS	NEELB	Spanish
Kilcoan Primary School ISLANDMAGEE	NEELB	Spanish
Kilmoyle Primary School BALLYMONEY	NEELB	Spanish
Kilrea Primary School KILREA	NEELB	Spanish
Knockloughrim Primary School KNOCKLOUGHRIM	NEELB	Spanish
Knocknagin Primary School, DESERTMARTIN	NEELB	Spanish
Landhead Primary School, BALLYMONEY	NEELB	Spanish
Leaney Primary School BALLYMONEY	NEELB	Spanish
Loanends Primary School CRUMLIN	NEELB	Spanish
Longstone Primary School AHOGHILL	NEELB	Spanish
Macosquin Primary School, MACOSQUIN	NEELB	Spanish
Magherafelt Primary School MAGHERAFELT	NEELB	Spanish
Mallusk Primary School NEWTOWNABBEY	NEELB	Spanish
Millburn Primary School COLERAINE	NEELB	Spanish
Millstrand Integrated Primary School PORTRUSH	NEELB	Spanish
Moorfields Primary School BALLYMENA	NEELB	Spanish
Mossgrove Primary School, NEWTOWNABBEY	NEELB	Spanish
Mossley Primary School, NEWTOWNABBEY	NEELB	Spanish
Mount St Michael's Primary School RANDALSTOWN	NEELB	Spanish
Moyle Primary School, LARNE	NEELB	Spanish
Oakfield Primary School CARRICKFERGUS	NEELB	Spanish
Olderfleet Primary School, LARNE	NEELB	Spanish
Parkhall Primary School ANTRIM	NEELB	Spanish
Portglenone Primary School, PORTGLENONE	NEELB	Spanish
Portrush Primary School PORTRUSH	NEELB	Spanish
Portstewart Primary School PORTSTEWART	NEELB	Spanish
Randalstown Primary School, RANDALSTOWN	NEELB	Spanish
Silverstream Primary School GREENISLAND	NEELB	Spanish
Spires Integrated Primary School MAGHERAFELT	NEELB	Spanish
St Brigid's Primary School, CLOUGHMILLS	NEELB	Spanish
St Brigid's Primary School, BALLYMONEY	NEELB	Spanish
St Brigid's Primary School, BALLYMENA	NEELB	Spanish
St Brigid's Primary School (Tirkane) MAGHERA	NEELB	Spanish
St Ciaran's Primary School CUSHENDUN	NEELB	Spanish
St Columb's Primary School DESERTMARTIN	NEELB	Spanish
St James' Primary School, NEWTOWNABBEY	NEELB	Spanish
St John Bosco Primary School PORTGLENONE	NEELB	Spanish
St Joseph's Primary School CRUMLIN	NEELB	Spanish

School	ELB	Language
St Mary's on the Hill Primary School, NEWTOWNABBEY	NEELB	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School BELLAGHY	NEELB	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School PORTGLENONE	NEELB	Spanish
St Nicholas' Primary School, CARRICKFERGUS	NEELB	Spanish
St Olcan's Primary School ARMOY	NEELB	Spanish
St. Oliver Plunkett's School, TOOMEBRIDGE	NEELB	Spanish
St Patrick's & St Brigid's Primary School BALLYCASTLE	NEELB	Spanish
St Patrick's Primary School PORTRUSH	NEELB	Spanish
Straid Primary School BALLYCLARE	NEELB	Spanish
Straidbilly Primary School LISCOLMAN	NEELB	Spanish
Straidhavern Primary School NUTTS CORNER	NEELB	Spanish
Templepatrick Primary School TEMPLEPATRICK	NEELB	Spanish
Tildarg Primary School, BALLYCLARE	NEELB	Spanish
Tir-na-Nog Primary School, BALLYCLARE	NEELB	Spanish
Tobermore Primary School TOBERMORE	NEELB	Spanish
Victoria Primary School, CARRICKFERGUS	NEELB	Spanish
Whitehead Primary School WHITEHEAD	NEELB	Spanish
Whitehouse Primary School, NEWTOWNABBEY	NEELB	Spanish
Abbey Primary School, NEWTOWNARDS	SEELB	Spanish
Alexander Dickson Primary School BALLYGOWAN	SEELB	Spanish
All Childrens Integrated Primary School NEWCASTLE	SEELB	Spanish
Anahilt Primary School HILLSBOROUGH	SEELB	Spanish
Ballinderry Primary School, LOWER BALLINDERRY	SEELB	Spanish
Ballycarrickmaddy Primary School, LISBURN	SEELB	Spanish
Ballyholme Primary School BANGOR	SEELB	Spanish
Ballymacrickett Primary School GLENAVY	SEELB	Spanish
Ballynahinch Primary School BALLYNAHINCH	SEELB	Spanish
Brownlee Primary School LISBURN	SEELB	Spanish
Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche CASTLEWELLAN	SEELB	Spanish
Carrickmannon Primary School BALLYGOWAN	SEELB	Spanish
Carrowdore Primary School CARROWDORE	SEELB	Spanish
Carryduff Primary School CARRYDUFF	SEELB	Spanish
Cedar Integrated Primary School CROSSGAR	SEELB	Spanish
Christ the Redeemer Primary School, BELFAST	SEELB	Spanish
Cregagh Primary School, BELFAST	SEELB	Spanish
Cumran Primary School CLOUGH	SEELB	Spanish
Donaghadee Primary School DONAGHADEE	SEELB	Spanish
Downpatrick Primary School DOWNPATRICK	SEELB	Spanish

School	ELB	Language
Dromara Primary School DROMARA	SEELB	Spanish
Drumlins Integrated Primary, BALLYNAHINCH	SEELB	Spanish
Dunmurry Primary School DUNMURRY	SEELB	Spanish
Fort Hill Primary School LISBURN	SEELB	Spanish
Glasswater Primary School CROSSGAR	SEELB	Spanish
Greyabbey Primary School, GREYABBEY	SEELB	Spanish
Holywood Primary School HOLYWOOD	SEELB	Spanish
Killowen Primary School LISBURN	SEELB	Spanish
Kircubbin Primary School KIRCUBBIN	SEELB	Spanish
Kirkistown Primary School CLOUGHEY	SEELB	Spanish
Leadhill Primary School, BELFAST	SEELB	Spanish
Lisnasharragh Primary School, BELFAST	SEELB	Spanish
Lough View Integrated Primary, BELFAST	SEELB	Spanish
Newcastle Primary School, NEWCASTLE	SEELB	Spanish
Newtownards Model Primary School NEWTOWNARDS	SEELB	Spanish
Our Lady & St Patrick's Primary School, DOWNPATRICK	SEELB	Spanish
Portaferry Integrated Primary School PORTAFERRY	SEELB	Spanish
Portavogie Primary School, PORTAVOGIE	SEELB	Spanish
Riverdale Primary School, LISBURN	SEELB	Spanish
Rowandale Integrated Primary School MOIRA	SEELB	Spanish
Seymour Hill Primary School DUNMURRY	SEELB	Spanish
St Aloysius Primary School, LISBURN	SEELB	Spanish
St Bernard's Primary School, BELFAST	SEELB	Spanish
St Brigid's Primary School DOWNPATRICK	SEELB	Spanish
St Comgall's Primary School BANGOR	SEELB	Spanish
St Joseph's Primary School KILLOUGH	SEELB	Spanish
St Joseph's Primary School STRANGFORD	SEELB	Spanish
St Joseph's Primary School CROSSGAR	SEELB	Spanish
St Joseph's Primary School, LISBURN	SEELB	Spanish
St Joseph's Primary School, DOWNPATRICK	SEELB	Spanish
St Macartan's Primary School LOUGHINISLAND	SEELB	Spanish
St Malachy's Primary School, DOWNPATRICK	SEELB	Spanish
St Mark's Primary School DUNMURRY	SEELB	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School SAINTFIELD	SEELB	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School NEWCASTLE	SEELB	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School PORTAFERRY	SEELB	Spanish
St Nicholas Primary School ARDGLASS	SEELB	Spanish
St Patrick's Primary, CASTLEWELLAN	SEELB	Spanish

School	ELB	Language
St Patrick's Primary School DOWNPATRICK	SEELB	Spanish
St Patrick's Primary School, HOLYWOOD	SEELB	Spanish
St Patrick's Primary School, PORTAFERRY	SEELB	Spanish
St. Mary's Primary School ARDGLASS	SEELB	Spanish
St. Mary's Primary School KIRCUBBIN	SEELB	Spanish
Armstrong Primary School ARMAGH	SELB	Spanish
Ballylifford Primary School COOKSTOWN	SELB	Spanish
Blessed Patrick O'loughran Primary School CASTLECAULFIELD	SELB	Spanish
Bocombra Primary School, PORTADOWN	SELB	Spanish
Bush Primary School DUNGANNON	SELB	Spanish
Bunscoil an Iúir, NEWRY	SELB	Spanish
Clea Primary School KEADY	SELB	Spanish
Clontifleece Primary School WARRENPOINT	SELB	Spanish
Cloughoge Primary School NEWRY	SELB	Spanish
Cookstown Primary School COOKSTOWN	SELB	Spanish
Cortamlet Primary School ALTNAMACHIN	SELB	Spanish
Donacloney Primary School DONACLONEY	SELB	Spanish
Donaghmore Primary School DONAGHMORE	SELB	Spanish
Dromore Road Primary School WARRENPOINT	SELB	Spanish
Drumadonnell Primary School BALLYRONEY	SELB	Spanish
Edenderry Primary School, PORTADOWN	SELB	Spanish
Hardy Memorial Primary School RICHILL	SELB	Spanish
Hart Memorial Primary School PORTADOWN	SELB	Spanish
Holy Cross Primary School KILKEEL	SELB	Spanish
Howard Primary School MOYGASHEL	SELB	Spanish
Jonesboro' Primary School NEWRY	SELB	Spanish
Keady Primary School ARMAGH	SELB	Spanish
Kilbroney Integrated Primary School ROSTREVOR	SELB	Spanish
Lisfearty Primary School DUNGANNON	SELB	Spanish
Lisnadill Primary School ARMAGH	SELB	Spanish
Lissan Primary School COOKSTOWN	SELB	Spanish
Milltown Primary School BANBRIDGE	SELB	Spanish
Moneydarragh Primary School ANNALONG	SELB	Spanish
Moyallon Primary School PORTADOWN	SELB	Spanish
Mullaglass Primary School, NEWRY	SELB	Spanish
Portadown Integrated Primary School PORTADOWN	SELB	Spanish
Poyntzpass Primary School POYNTZPASS	SELB	Spanish
Richmount Primary School, PORTADOWN	SELB	Spanish

School	ELB	Language
Seagoe Primary School, PORTADOWN	SELB	Spanish
St Brendan's Primary School CRAIGAVON	SELB	Spanish
St Clare's Convent Primary School, NEWRY	SELB	Spanish
St Colman's Abbey Primary School, NEWRY	SELB	Spanish
St Colman's Primary School BANBRIDGE	SELB	Spanish
St Dallan's Primary School WARRENPOINT	SELB	Spanish
St John's Primary School COALISLAND	SELB	Spanish
St Joseph's Convent Primary School NEWRY	SELB	Spanish
St Josephs and St James Primary School POYNTZPASS	SELB	Spanish
St Joseph's Primary School (Meigh) KILLEAVY	SELB	Spanish
St Malachy's Primary School CARNAGAT	SELB	Spanish
St Malachy's Primary School MONEYMORE	SELB	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School COOKSTOWN	SELB	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School BANBRIDGE	SELB	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School (Granemore) KEADY	SELB	Spanish
St Michael's Primary School (Finnis) DROMARA	SELB	Spanish
St Oliver Plunkett Primary School FORKHILL	SELB	Spanish
St Patrick's Primary School (Derrynaseer) AUGHAGALLON	SELB	Spanish
St Patrick's Primary School Loup MONEYMORE	SELB	Spanish
St Teresa's Primary School LURGAN	SELB	Spanish
The Royal School Preparatory Dept ARMAGH	SELB	Spanish
Windsor Hill Primary School, NEWRY	SELB	Spanish
Bready Jubilee Primary School BREADY	WELB	Spanish
Bridgehill Primary School CASTLEDERG	WELB	Spanish
Broadbridge Primary School EGLINTON	WELB	Spanish
Brookeborough Primary School BROOKEBOROUGH	WELB	Spanish
Christ the King Primary School OMAGH	WELB	Spanish
Cooley Primary School COOLEY	WELB	Spanish
Cumber Claudy Primary School CLAUDY	WELB	Spanish
Donemana Primary School DONEMANA	WELB	Spanish
Drumrane Primary School DUNGIVEN	WELB	Spanish
Dunmullan Primary School KNOCKMOYLE	WELB	Spanish
Ebrington Controlled Primary School DERRY	WELB	Spanish
Edwards Primary School CASTLEDERG	WELB	Spanish
Enniskillen Integrated Primary School ENNISKILLEN	WELB	Spanish
Envagh Primary School DRUMQUIN	WELB	Spanish
Fountain Primary School, DERRY	WELB	Spanish
Gaelscoil Éadain Mhóir, Lecky Road DERRY	WELB	Spanish

School	ELB	Language
Gaelscoil na gCrann, Ballynamullan OMAGH	WELB	Spanish
Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh STRABANE	WELB	Spanish
Glendermott Primary School DERRY	WELB	Spanish
Good Shepherd Primary and Nursery School, DERRY	WELB	Spanish
Gortnagarn Primary School OMAGH	WELB	Spanish
Groarty Controlled Integrated Primary School, DERRY	WELB	Spanish
Holy Child Primary School DERRY	WELB	Spanish
Holy Family Primary School BALLYMAGROARTY	WELB	Spanish
Limavady Central Primary School LIMAVADY	WELB	Spanish
Lisbellaw Primary School LISBELLAW	WELB	Spanish
Lisnagelvin Primary School DERRY	WELB	Spanish
Longtower Primary School DERRY	WELB	Spanish
Loreto Convent Primary School OMAGH	WELB	Spanish
Maguiresbridge Primary School MAGUIRESBRIDGE	WELB	Spanish
McClintock Primary School, OMAGH	WELB	Spanish
Moat Primary School, Lisnaskea ENNISKILLEN	WELB	Spanish
Newbuildings Primary School, DERRY	WELB	Spanish
Oakgrove Integrated Primary School DERRY	WELB	Spanish
Queen Elizabeth II Primary School, Kilskerry TRILLICK	WELB	Spanish
Sion Mills Primary School SION MILLS	WELB	Spanish
St Aidan's Primary School Magilligan LIMAVADY	WELB	Spanish
St Anne's Primary School STRABANE	WELB	Spanish
St Colmcille's Primary School CLAUDY	WELB	Spanish
St Columbkille's Primary School CARRICKMORE	WELB	Spanish
St Eugene's Primary School, DERRY	WELB	Spanish
St Eugene's Primary School LISNASKEA	WELB	Spanish
St John's Primary School DERRY	WELB	Spanish
St Joseph's Primary School EDERNEY	WELB	Spanish
St Mary's Girls' Primary School STRABANE	WELB	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School TEMPO	WELB	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School, Maguiresbridge ENNISKILLEN	WELB	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School BELLANALECK	WELB	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School DERRYLIN	WELB	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School, NEWTOWNBUTLER	WELB	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School, Altinure CLAUDY	WELB	Spanish
St Mary's Primary School, Killyclogher OMAGH	WELB	Spanish
St Nailes Primary School, KINAWLEY	WELB	Spanish
St Ninnidh's Primary School, DERRYLIN	WELB	Spanish

School	ELB	Language
St Oliver Plunkett Primary School STRATHFOYLE	WELB	Spanish
St Patrick's Primary School GARVARY	WELB	Spanish
St Patrick's Primary School CASTLEDERG	WELB	Spanish
St Patrick's Primary School NEWTOWNSTEWART	WELB	Spanish
St Scire's Primary School TRILLICK	WELB	Spanish
St. Columba's Primary School DERRY	WELB	Spanish
Tempo Primary School, TEMPO	WELB	Spanish

School	ELB	Language
Holy Cross Boys' Primary School, BELFAST	BELB	Irish
St Aidans Christian Brothers PS, BELFAST	BELB	Irish
St Clares Primary School, BELFAST	BELB	Irish
St Joseph's Primary School, BELFAST	BELB	Irish
St Kevin's Primary School, BELFAST	BELB	Irish
St Malachy's Primary School, BELFAST	BELB	Irish
Altayeskey Primary School DRAPERSTOWN	NEELB	Irish
Barnish Primary School BALLYCASTLE	NEELB	Irish
Creggan Primary School, RANDALSTOWN	NEELB	Irish
Greenlough Primary School (St Mary's) PORTGLENONE	NEELB	Irish
St Brigid's Primary School KNOCKLOUGHRIM	NEELB	Irish
St Columba's Primary School GARVAGH	NEELB	Irish
St John's Primary School SWATRAGH	NEELB	Irish
St MacNissius' Primary School TANNAGHMORE	NEELB	Irish
St Mary's Primary School, Gortaclea CUSHENDALL	NEELB	Irish
St Mary's Primary School DRAPERSTOWN	NEELB	Irish
St Patrick's & St Joseph's Primary School TIRKEERAN, GARVAGH	NEELB	Irish
St Patrick's Primary School, Loughiel BALLYMENA	NEELB	Irish
St Patrick's Primary School (Glen) MAGHERA	NEELB	Irish
St. Mary's Primary School BALLYCASTLE	NEELB	Irish
Christ the King Primary School BALLYNAHINCH	SEELB	Irish
Holy Family Primary School DOWNPATRICK	SEELB	Irish
Millennium Integrated Primary School LISDOONAN	SEELB	Irish
Sacred Heart Primary School DUNDRUM	SEELB	Irish
St Caolan's Primary School SAINTFIELD	SEELB	Irish
St Colman's Primary School BELFAST	SEELB	Irish
St Joseph's Primary School CARRYDUFF	SEELB	Irish
St Malachy's Primary School CASTLEWELLAN	SEELB	Irish
Ballyholland Primary School NEWRY	SELB	Irish

School	ELB	Language
Carrick Primary School WARRENPOINT	SELB	Irish
Darkley Primary School, DARKLEY	SELB	Irish
Dromintree Primary School NEWRY	SELB	Irish
Holy Trinity Primary School COOKSTOWN	SELB	Irish
Mount St Catherine's Primary School ARMAGH	SELB	Irish
Our Lady's Primary School (Tullysaran) BENBURB	SELB	Irish
St Brigid's Primary School COALISLAND	SELB	Irish
St Brigid's Primary School AUGHER	SELB	Irish
St Brigid's Primary School CROSSMAGLEN	SELB	Irish
St Bronagh's Primary School ROSTREVOR	SELB	Irish
St Francis of Assisi Primary School KEADY	SELB	Irish
St Jarlath's Primary School, Blackwatertown DUNGANNON	SELB	Irish
St Johns Primary School MIDDLETOWN	SELB	Irish
St John's Primary School MOY	SELB	Irish
St Joseph's Primary School CALEDON	SELB	Irish
St Joseph's Primary School COOKSTOWN	SELB	Irish
St Joseph's Primary School NEWRY	SELB	Irish
St Malachy's Primary School CAMLOUGH	SELB	Irish
St Mary's Primary School STEWARTSTOWN	SELB	Irish
St Mary's Primary School BALLYGAWLEY	SELB	Irish
St Mary's Primary School RATHFRILAND	SELB	Irish
St Mary's Primary School DUNGANNON	SELB	Irish
St Mary's Primary School MULLAGHBAWN	SELB	Irish
St Mary's Primary School LURGAN	SELB	Irish
St Mary's Primary School, AUGHNACLOY	SELB	Irish
St Oliver Plunkett Primary School KILMORE	SELB	Irish
St Patrick's Primary School, ARDBOE	SELB	Irish
St Patrick's Primary School MAGHERALIN	SELB	Irish
St Patrick's Primary School HILLTOWN	SELB	Irish
St Patrick's Primary School CROSSMAGLEN	SELB	Irish
St Patrick's Primary School COALISLAND	SELB	Irish
St Patrick's Primary School DONAGHMORE	SELB	Irish
St Patrick's Primary School ARMAGH	SELB	Irish
St Patrick's Primary School MAYOBRIDGE	SELB	Irish
St Patrick's Primary School DUNGANNON	SELB	Irish
St Patrick's Primary School MONEYMORE	SELB	Irish
All Saints Primary School OMAGH	WELB	Irish
Cornagague Primary School ENNISKILLEN	WELB	Irish

School	ELB	Language
Drumduff Primary School SIXMILECROSS	WELB	Irish
Drumnabey Primary School CASTLEDERG	WELB	Irish
Faughanvale Primary School GREYSTEEL	WELB	Irish
Killyhommon Primary School ENNISKILLEN	WELB	Irish
Knocknagor Primary School TRILLICK	WELB	Irish
Recarson Primary School OMAGH	WELB	Irish
Rosemount Primary School, DERRY	WELB	Irish
Steelstown Primary School, DERRY	WELB	Irish
St Brigid's Primary School, Mountfield OMAGH	WELB	Irish
St Dymphna's Primary School, DROMORE	WELB	Irish
St Finlough's Primary School, (Sistrakeel), LIMAVADY	WELB	Irish
St Joseph's Primary School, DRUMQUIN	WELB	Irish
St Mary's Primary School, Ballymagorry STRABANE	WELB	Irish
St Matthew's Primary School, Garvaghey BALLYGAWLEY	WELB	Irish
St Patrick's Primary School, DERRYGONNELLY	WELB	Irish
St Peter's & St Paul's Primary School DUNGIVEN	WELB	Irish
St Teresa's Primary School, Loughmacrory OMAGH	WELB	Irish
Tummery Primary School DROMORE	WELB	Irish

School	ELB	Language
Holy Rosary PS, Sunnyside Crescent BELFAST	BELB	Polish
St Matthew's PS, Seaforde Street BELFAST	BELB	Polish
Strandtown Primary School, BELFAST	BELB	Polish
Victoria Park PS, Strandburn Street BELFAST	BELB	Polish
Kirkinriola PS BALLYMENA	NEELB	Polish
St Columba's Primary School KILREA	NEELB	Polish
St Comgall's PS, Ballymena Road ANTRIM	NEELB	Polish
St Joseph's PS, Greystone Road ANTRIM	NEELB	Polish
St Joseph's PS, DUNLOY	NEELB	Polish
St Patrick's PS RASHARKIN	NEELB	Polish
Knockbreda PS, BELFAST	SEELB	Polish
Knockmore PS, LISBURN	SEELB	Polish
Lisburn Central PS, LISBURN	SEELB	Polish
St Finian's PS NEWTOWNARDS	SEELB	Polish
St Patrick's PS BALLYNAHINCH	SEELB	Polish
Drumhillery PS MIDDLETON	SELB	Polish
Edendork PS DUNGANNON	SELB	Polish
Our Lady's & St Mochua's PS KEADY	SELB	Polish

School	ELB	Language
St Patrick's PS NEWRY	SELB	Polish
Holy Trinity PS ENNISKILLEN	WELB	Polish
Omagh County PS OMAGH	WELB	Polish
St Lawrence's PS FINTONA	WELB	Polish

Education and Skills Authority: Integrated Sector

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education how the integrated sector will be included in education planning and governance, given that the new Education and Skills Authority proposes the establishment of Sector Support Bodies for the controlled and maintained sectors only.
(AQW 5991/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The functions of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) will apply to all grant-aided schools, including Irish-medium and integrated schools. Persons representing the interests of the Irish-medium and integrated sectors may apply to be appointed as members of the ESA. My Department will continue to support Comhairle na Gaelscoaíochta and the Council for Integrated Education to represent their respective sectors.

Schools: Pupil Discipline

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education (i) for his assessment of pupil discipline in schools; (ii) how much funding his Department has provided to help teachers and schools to improve pupil discipline over the past 5 years; and (iii) if his Department has a policy or a strategic framework on addressing pupil discipline in schools.
(AQW 6014/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department's policy and framework is set out in the publication 'Promoting and Sustaining Good Behaviour: A Discipline Strategy for Schools' (1998) and is based on a support model of progressively more intensive interventions for pupils whose behaviour is challenging. The subsequent publication of 'Pastoral Care in Schools: Promoting Positive Behaviour' (2001) offered best practice guidelines on successful discipline strategies and practices in schools.

Since September 1998, the Department has made additional resources available to ensure there is a consistent level of external support for all schools across all Education and Library Board areas. Some £1m of earmarked monies is allocated to the Boards per annum for the provision of Behaviour Support Teams. These teams are made up of staff with a range of expertise such as Educational Psychology, Education Welfare and Curriculum Advisory Support Services, as well as outreach and peripatetic teacher support. The teams provide advice to schools on developing whole-school approaches to good behaviour, classroom management skills and short-term support for individual pupils and immediate advice on action in response to serious incidents.

In 2010, the Education and Training Inspectorate published its 'Report of an Evaluation of Pupil Behaviour in Schools and other Educational Settings'. The inspection findings found that there was "clear evidence that the pastoral care guidance put forward by DE in 1998, and the ELBs' and schools' subsequent high level of support in this area, are ensuring that the vast majority of pupils behave well, look forward to, and engage willingly in school life".

General Teaching Council NI Report

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how his Department (i) plans to respond to the recent General Teaching Council NI report which stated that 80 percent of teachers considered administration and government policies to be frustrating aspects of professional life; and (ii) whether he is satisfied that the current administrative burden on teachers is (a) at a workable level; and (b) improving teaching or pupil attainment within schools.
(AQW 6016/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I attended the launch of the General Teaching Council's "Teachers' Voice 2010" Report and have studied its findings. I am keen to ensure that the professional voice of teachers is heard in the context of how our education system can best meet the needs of our children. To this end, I have asked my officials to take into account, where possible, the content of the Report in the development and refinement of Departmental policies.

I recognise that one of our greatest asset is our workforce and it is clear that the change flowing from more strategic planning of provision that I announced in my Autumn Statement to the Assembly on 26 September will require a more flexible school workforce.

The issue of teacher workload has recently been the focus of intensive negotiations between the employing authorities and the teacher unions at the Teacher Negotiating Committee (TNC). It is pleasing to note that the TNC has recently finalised a Workload Agreement together with supplementary guidance for schools on cover arrangements and time budgeting. The central purpose of the Workload Agreement is to ensure that the workload of all teachers is fair and reasonable so that they can focus on the needs of the learner. The TNC has agreed to undertake a review of the Workload Agreement in June/July 2012 and biennially thereafter.

In addition, there have been a number of significant developments through the TNC in recent years to address key issues relating to teacher workload and the associated health and well being risks. These include a revised Managing Attendance Procedure in 2008; the introduction of an independent 24 hour confidential telephone counselling service for all teachers from 1 April 2009; a range of schemes to improve the flexibility of teachers' working patterns, ratified by the TNC in June 2009; and a new strategy to promote a more proactive approach to Teacher Health and Wellbeing, which issued to schools in May 2011.

My school improvement policy and literacy and numeracy strategy recognise and support the central role of teachers in raising standards. Both policies are based on existing best practice in schools and don't ask anymore than what our best schools and teachers are already doing. In my Autumn statement I made clear that we have the right policies in place for raising standards. My focus now is on stepping up the pace in terms of the implementation and delivery of existing policies.

Under the aegis of the Strategic Planning and Policy Development Forum, the membership of which includes the recognised trade unions, relevant stakeholders now have an early opportunity to shape and influence the development of education policy. My Department has also commenced work on a review of the education workforce and central to this will be the key issue of workload.

Whilst I appreciate that workload remains a key area of concern for teachers and their representatives I am satisfied that through the work of the TNC, the Strategic Forum and the School Workforce Review that current workload concerns will be addressed to benefit teachers and the pupils they teach.

Primary Languages Programme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education to provide a breakdown of the ages of the children who are receiving tuition through the Primary Languages Programme.
(AQW 6049/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The South-Eastern Education and Library Board is the lead board in administering the Primary Languages Programme has advised that it does not collate the information requested and an exercise to do so would result in disproportionate costs. However, I can confirm that the Primary Languages Programme was introduced to give our youngest pupils in Foundation Stage/ Key Stage 1 (P1 – P4), the opportunity to learn an additional language. It is up to individual schools to decide to opt into the programme and also to decide which year group they wish to introduce the programme to their pupils.

Primary Languages Programme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education how many primary schools in each Education and Library Board area are delivering the Primary Languages Programme.
(AQW 6051/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The 412 schools currently participating in the programme are detailed in the table below by Education and Library Board area.

ELB Board	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	WELB
Number of Schools	33	123	76	96	84

Primary Languages Programme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education to detail the (i) recruitment; and (ii) training process for peripatetic teachers delivering the Primary Languages Programme.
(AQW 6052/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The South-Eastern Education and Library Board is the lead board in administering the Primary Languages Programme and has advised that the recruitment of tutors follows an open and transparent recruitment process using the local press.

Successful tutors receive 3 full days training on delivering teaching modules and general protocol in schools. They also attend a minimum of one cluster meeting per term to fine tune teaching practice and address administrative issues. The programme's co-ordinator provides individual support visits with tutors if required.

Primary Languages Programme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of pupils receiving tuition through the Primary Languages Programme, broken down by language; (ii) the total number of hours of tuition per week they receive; and (iii) the number of weeks in each programme.
(AQW 6054/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The South-Eastern Education and Library Board is the lead board in administering the Primary Languages Programme and has confirmed that as at 30 June 2011, 27,473 pupils are participating in the programme each week. Pupils receive 20 – 30 minutes of tuition per week for 30 weeks. The table below details the number of pupils receiving tuition through the programme broken down by language:

Language	Spanish	Irish	Polish
Number of Pupils	21,174	4,429	1,870

Primary Languages Programme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education whether any requests have been made for additional languages to be included in the Primary Languages Programme.
(AQW 6057/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Primary Languages Programme was introduced to provide support for those primary schools that wished to make available modern languages. Currently, Spanish, Irish, and more recently, Polish are available and I have no plans to introduce additional languages into the programme.

The Department has not received any direct requests for additional languages, but the South Eastern Education and Library Board who administer the Primary Languages Programme advise that parent evaluations have indicated a desire for French, some requests for German and a few requests for Mandarin/Chinese.

It is of course open to schools to offer additional language learning opportunities outside of the Primary Languages Programme and I am pleased that many schools choose to do so. There is a range of existing support arrangements in place for those primary schools wishing to offer an additional language, including through the education and library boards and CCEA, which has developed material in French, German, Spanish and Irish to assist Primary teachers to develop and integrate an element of language teaching into their classrooms. These resources are available to all schools via the primary languages resource section of the Curriculum website.

STEM Subjects: Uptake

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what additional measures his Department is taking to encourage an increase in the uptake of science, technology, engineering and maths subjects.
(AQW 6066/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The revised curriculum, which is now in place across all year groups in all grant-aided schools, provides much greater freedom for teachers to explore STEM-related learning with pupils. The full implementation of the Entitlement Framework in September 2015 will guarantee all young people at Key Stage 4 and at Sixth Form regardless of the school which a young person attends or where he/she lives, equality of access to a broad, balanced and more economically relevant pupil-centric curriculum. This increased choice is being supported with improved careers education, information, advice and guidance, with a particular focus on STEM-related career opportunities.

Since the publication of the Report of the STEM Review, my Department has been taking significant action on a number of fronts to encourage an increase in the uptake of STEM subjects. For example, a programme of professional development for teachers has been commissioned, as well as improving the range and quality of STEM resources that are available to teachers and pupils. We are supporting the Institute of Physics in Ireland's establishment of a physics-teacher network here. A web-based resource 'STEMWorks' has been developed to enhance classroom practice and encourage pupils at Key Stage 3 and beyond to study STEM related subjects. At Key Stage 2, a series of case studies and thematic units have been developed to improve teachers' and pupils' understanding of connections between STEM school-based learning and the STEM 'world of work'. Extensive use is being made of the STEM truck, a state-of-the-art £1.2 million mobile teaching laboratory and workshop.

My Department also continues to fund a range of exciting and stimulating STEM related events to ensure that STEM subjects are seen as exciting, stimulating and fulfilling by our young people. These include the BT Young Scientist's Competition, the Stock Market Challenge, Maths Week and the Irish Science Olympiads. In addition, annual funding enables Sentinus to deliver a portfolio of STEM enhancement and enrichment programmes, which during 2010/11 promoted STEM engagement to over 58,500 primary and post-primary pupils.

Preschool Places: South Antrim

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Education have many children in the South Antrim area aged (i) two; (ii) three; and (iii) four received a pre-school place in (a) 2009; and (b) 2010.
(AQW 6079/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information is only available in the format requested for children enrolled in nursery units and reception classes in primary schools and in nursery schools and the breakdown across ages is provided in the table below.

The Department does not hold data on the specific age of children in funded places in Voluntary and Private pre-school centres. However, I can advise the Member that there were 256 (2009/10) and 341 (2010/11) children in funded places in voluntary and private pre-school centres in the constituency, all of whom were in their final pre-school year and were aged between 3 years 2 months and 4 years 2 months in the September in which they commenced their pre-school year.

Pupils enrolled in nursery and reception places located in the South Antrim constituency 2009/10 and 2010/11

Year	Age 2	Age 3	Age 4	Total enrolment
2009/10	#	741	*	835
2010/11	59	769	0	828

Source: NI school census

Note:

1 Age is taken at the 1st July 2009 and 2010.

2 Figures relate to children in nursery units and reception classes in primary schools and in nursery schools.

'*' denotes fewer than 5 pupils

'#' denotes figures more than 5 suppressed due to potential identification of individual pupils.

DE: Christmas Cards

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to list all the recipients of official departmental Christmas cards signed by him, or his predecessor, in each year since 2007.
(AQW 6089/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Please see attached a list of organisations, schools and individuals to whom I have sent a Christmas card this year. The schools listed are those that have I have visited since taking up office in May 2011 and others on the list are generally those with whom I have had direct contact, either through correspondence, meetings or events I have attended.

I do not consider it relevant to provide information in respect of my predecessor.

Christmas Card List - 2011

- Ministers for Education in Dublin, England, Scotland, Wales and the Channel Islands
- Alzheimer's Society
- Association of Principal Teachers in Integrated Schools - Chair
- Archdiocese of Armagh
- Association of Controlled Grammar Schools
- Cathaoirleach, Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools – Chief Executive Designate
- Early Years Organisation – Chief Executive
- Assembly Education Committee – Chair and Vice Chair
- 5 Education and Library Boards - Chief Executives, Chairs and Commissioners
- Equality Commission – Chief Commissioner
- Staff Commission for Education & Library Boards – Chair and Secretary
- Education and Skills Authority – Chief Executive Designate
- Foyle School and Employer Connections
- Governing Bodies Association - Chair
- Institute of Directors – Chief Executive
- Integrated Education Fund – Chair and Director
- Irish Football Association – Chief Executive
- Middletown Centre for Autism - Acting Chair, Chief Executive and Director
- National Autistic Society
- North Down Borough Council
- NI Association for Mental Health
- NI Commissioner for Children & Young People
- NI Council for Ethnic Minorities
- NI Council for Integrated Education – Chief Executive & Chair
- NI Youth Forum - Director
- Parents and Professional Autism (PAPA) Resource Centre
- Polish Ambassador for Education
- Príomhfheidhmeannach Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta
- Príomhfheidhmeannach Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta
- Regional Training Unit – Director
- Save the Children Fund
- Trustees of Catholic Managed Schools
- Ulster Council - GAA
- Youth Action - Director
- Youth Council – Chief Executive & Chair
- Youthnet – Director
- Teachers' Unions
- Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland – General Secretary
- Association of Teachers and Lecturers - Director
- General Teaching Council
- Irish National Teachers' Organisation – General Secretary
- National Association of Head Teachers – President and Regional Official
- National Association SUWT – Regional Organiser
- NI Public Service Alliance
- Teachers' Negotiating Committee - Chair
- Teachers' Union of Ireland – General Secretary
- Ulster Teachers Union – General Secretary

- Unite Union
- School – Principals or Chairs of Board of Governors
- Ballyoran Primary School
- Belfast Boys' Model School
- Brownlow integrated College
- Castle Tower Special School
- Ceara Special School
- Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta
- Derrylatinee Primary School
- Ebrington Controlled Primary School
- Foyle College
- Gaelscoil Eanna
- Lagan College
- Lismore Comprehensive College
- Lisneal College
- Little Acorns Playgroup
- Oakwood Integrated Primary School
- Primate Dixon Primary School
- Rowandale Integrated Primary School
- Sacred Heart College
- St Bernard's Primary School
- St Colman's (Bann) Primary School
- St Columba's Primary School
- St Francis Primary School
- St Gerard's Education Resource Centre – Chair of Boards of Governors
- St Joseph's College
- St Louise's Comprehensive College
- St Louis Grammar School
- St Mark's High School
- St Mary's Primary School
- St Mary's Gortnaghey Primary School
- St Patrick's College, Bearnageeha
- St Paul's Junior High School
- Slemish Colege
- Wellington College

Schools: Promoting Good Mental Health

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education to detail the extent to which schools currently have a duty to promote good mental health and teach children how to deal with mental health issues.
(AQW 6096/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The statutory duties placed on a school's Board of Governors in relation to pupils' health and welfare are detailed in Chapter 13 of the DE publication "Every School a Good School"- "The Governors' Role – A Guide for Governors" which is accessible on the Department's website at http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/85-schools/5-school-management/79-school_governors_pg/schools_79_governor-roles-and-responsibilities_pg.htm . This includes ensuring that the school's pastoral care arrangements protect pupils from harm, safeguard their health and welfare and support their learning and development.

Schools are also required under The Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (NI) 2007 to teach our young people about the importance of good mental health. At primary school, managing feelings and emotions is a compulsory element of Personal Development and Mutual Understanding, and at post-primary school it is taught through Learning for Life and Work where all pupils should be provided with opportunities to understand the importance of recognising and managing factors that may influence emotional/mental health throughout life.

To promote and support the awareness of mental health issues in schools my Department is developing a Programme, in partnership with a range of key stakeholders from schools, the voluntary and community sector including officials from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. The Programme, once established, will make a significant contribution to the wider strategies around improving mental health in our community.

Department for Employment and Learning

Institute of Professional Legal Studies

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many (i) Bar students; and (ii) solicitor students at the Institute of Professional Legal Studies have received grants in each of the last ten years; and what was the average grant paid in each of these years.
(AQW 5942/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): Departmental funding for Northern Ireland domiciled students pursuing postgraduate diplomas and certificates, including those for legal practice, in the United Kingdom has not been available since September 2005.

Prior to 2005, such courses were funded under my Department's Discretionary Awards scheme. This scheme was administered by the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs) on behalf of my Department.

The North Eastern, Southern, South Eastern and Western ELBs have indicated that in academic year 2004/05, 21 Northern Ireland domiciled bar students studying at the Institute of Professional Legal Studies had their tuition fees of £3,010 paid in full. Of those 21 students, 14 were eligible to receive a means-tested maintenance grant with an average grant paid of £1,211.

They have also indicated that in academic year 2004/05, 75 Northern Ireland domiciled solicitor students studying at the Institute of Professional Legal Studies had their tuition fees of £3,010 paid in full. Of those 75 students, 43 were eligible to receive a means-tested maintenance grant with an average grant paid of £1,087.

It has not been possible to include statistics from the Belfast Education and Library Board due to technical difficulties which prevented it from accessing the required information in the time-frame available. As soon as the Belfast Education and Library Board can access the required information, I will forward you updated figures.

Information for the academic years prior to 2004/05 is not available.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Electricity: Proposed Cross-border Interconnector

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given the substantial drop in energy demand in the Republic of Ireland since 2007, and the projections that demand growth will remain low over the next decade, for her assessment of the sustainability of the proposed cross-border interconnector.
(AQW 5721/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): The premise that the North South interconnector is required due to demand growth is not correct. The proposed interconnector is needed to support increased provision of renewable energy, improve security of supply and system resilience, and enhance competition and transmission efficiencies in the Single Electricity Market to the benefit of consumers.

Electricity: Proposed Cross-border Interconnector

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what departmental funding commitment exists in respect of the construction of the proposed cross-border electricity interconnector; and how is it anticipated that the project will be funded.
(AQW 5722/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There is currently no Departmental funding in respect of the construction of the proposed cross-border electricity interconnector. Any new interconnector would be funded via the Transmission Use of System tariff which is levied by Systems Operator Northern Ireland. Construction and operating costs will be scrutinised and approved by the Regulator.

Electricity: Proposed Cross-border Interconnector

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the costs and benefits of the proposed cross-border interconnector for Northern Ireland and its electricity consumers have been calculated; and how and when the results will be published.
(AQW 5723/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The final cost of constructing the interconnector will not be known until, and if, planning permission has been secured. Once all information is available a full cost benefit analysis will be undertaken by the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation to inform the Board of the Utility Regulator after which the results will be published.

Electricity: Proposed Cross-border Interconnector

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether a full options appraisal of the proposed cross-border electricity interconnector, including the range of anticipated costs and benefits on a whole life basis, has been completed.
(AQW 5724/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The final cost to construct and operate the proposed the interconnector over its expected life span will not be known until after planning permission has been secured. Once all information is available a full cost benefit analysis and appraisal of the options will be undertaken by the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation.

Electricity: Proposed Cross-border Interconnector

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether a price impact analysis, detailing the likely effect of the proposal on the prices payable by Northern Ireland consumers, has been carried out on the proposed cross-border electricity interconnector.
(AQW 5775/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The final cost of constructing the interconnector will not be known until, and if planning permission has been secured. Once all information is available a full cost benefit analysis will be undertaken by the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation to inform the Board of the Utility Regulator.

The Board will consider the costs and benefits of the scheme and its impact on security of supply sustainability and consumers. Customers in NI currently pay constraint costs due to the lack of a second interconnector. The second North – South

Interconnector is expected to reduce this cost by approximately £18-25 million per year, an estimated saving of £7 million per year for NI consumers.

Tamboran: Petroleum Licence

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what evaluation of the potential impact on the environment, including the integrity of the water supply, was conducted before a petroleum licence was granted to Tamboran in respect of west Fermanagh; and what risk assessment was undertaken.
(AQW 5776/11-15)

Mrs Foster: DETI carried out an assessment of the potential impact of the petroleum licence granted to Tamboran Resources Pty Ltd on Natura 2000 sites prior to the licence being granted, in accordance with its responsibilities under The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995, amended in 2004 and most recently by The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007, as the competent authority with respect to authorisations and consents relating to petroleum exploration. This assessment, which returned a Finding of No Significant Effect with regard to the firm commitments of the licence work programme only, remains open.

The potential environmental impact of future activities on the licence will be assessed if and when Tamboran submit applications to undertake such activities to the Department. In addition, exploration drilling including hydraulic fracturing would require Planning Permission and Environmental Impact Assessment.

Petroleum Licences

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment by what criteria are applications for petroleum licences judged.
(AQW 5777/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The criteria by which applications for petroleum licences are judged are set out in The Hydrocarbons Licensing Directive Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 and The Petroleum Production Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1987 as amended by The Petroleum Production (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010. Further details about the licence application process are given in the Guidance for Applicants for Petroleum Licences. These documents are available on the Energy pages of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment website

(http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-energy-index/minerals-and-petroleum/petroleum_licensing_2.htm).

Telecommunications: Provision in the Derrygonnelly, Boho and Monea

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the number of letters, emails and petitions, including the number of signatories, her Department has received regarding telecommunications provision in the Derrygonnelly, Boho and Monea areas of County Fermanagh; (ii) the measures she has taken to improve telecommunications provision in these areas; and (iii) the representations she has made to mobile phone companies regarding coverage problems in these areas.
(AQW 5835/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

(1) Since November 2007 my Department has received the following quantity of correspondence in relation to telecommunications issues in Derrygonnelly, Boho and Monea:

Area	Derrygonnelly	Boho	Monea
Number of items received	1	4	1

Two petitions have also been presented to my Department in relation to mobile services in Derrygonnelly by way of response to consultation on investment plans for 2011-2015.

(ii) Broadband services are available in all these areas and are delivered using a combination of technology platforms including fixed line, satellite and fixed wireless under investments brought forward by my Department.

(iii) I have made no representations to mobile phone companies in relation to these specific areas. My Department is committed to developing investment projects consistent with the priorities set out in our published consultation paper for the benefit of all of Northern Ireland.

Renewable Energy: Funding

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she anticipates any increase in funding for renewable energy given the announcement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer of £103m renewables funding for Scotland.
(AQW 5879/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The £103 million of funding announced in November for Scottish renewables projects is funded from the Scottish Fossil Fuel Levy, part of the Non-Fossil Fuels Obligation (NFFO) on suppliers of non renewable electricity. It is available to be accessed only by the Scottish Government.

In Northern Ireland, residual funds available from the sale of NFFO-NIROCs are used to offset electricity consumer costs.

Go For It Programme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given the success of the Go For It programme under the existing arrangements, and the fact that the contract allowed for two extension periods up to March 2013 to facilitate the delivery of the programme during the ongoing legal challenge, why the decision was taken to deliver the programme in-house.
(AQW 5896/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI is not currently delivering the Go For It Programme.

Go For It Programme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in relation to the Go For It programme, to detail the number of (i) business advisory sessions that were held; (ii) training seminars that were held; (iii) attendees at these training seminars; (iv) business clinics that were held; (v) hours of business planning advice that was given; and (vi) business start-up plans that were produced in (a) October 2010; (b) November 2010; (c) October 2011; and (d) November 2011.
(AQW 5897/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Under the Go For It brand, Invest NI delivered a suite of initiatives aimed at encouraging new business starts and early business growth. The Enterprise Development programme was the main start-up element of Go For It and, in October 2010 it delivered 428 business advisory sessions, 157 training seminars with 1707 attendees (541 individuals), 26 Business Clinics, and 456 hours of business planning. 221 business plans were also completed.

In November 2010, the Enterprise Development programme delivered 446 business advisory sessions, 169 training seminars with 1700 attendees (546 individuals), 30 Business Clinics, and 663 hours of business planning. 296 business plans were completed.

The Go For It programme was not in operation in October and November 2011.

Go For It Programme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many InvestNI staff are currently working on the delivery of the Go For It programme.
(AQW 5898/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI is not currently delivering the Go For It programme.

Go For It Programme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what changes have been made to the Go For It programme since the start of October 2011; and to highlight the rationale behind these changes.
(AQW 5899/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI is not currently delivering the Go For It programme.

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of the motion carried by the Assembly on 6 December 2011, regarding hydraulic fracturing, whether she will meet with me and two representatives from the lobby group based in Co. Fermanagh to listen to the concerns of the people in the area.
(AQW 5900/11-15)

Mrs Foster: If the Member wishes to arrange a meeting he should contact the DETI Private Office in the normal manner.

Petroleum Licences

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) how many applications there have been for petroleum licences in the last ten years; (ii) how many have been granted; (iii) for which areas were the licences granted; and (iv) who holds these licences.
(AQW 5922/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

(i) There have been twelve applications for petroleum licences in Northern Ireland in the last ten years.

(ii) Nine petroleum licences in Northern Ireland have been granted in the last ten years.

(iii) Four of these licences have been in the Rathlin sedimentary basin (parts of Counties Londonderry and Antrim), two have been in the Larne sedimentary basin (Co. Antrim), one in the Larne and Lough Neagh sedimentary basins (Co. Antrim), and two in the Lough Allen Basin (Co. Fermanagh).

(iv) Four of these petroleum licences are current and the licensees are detailed below:

Licence No	Licensee(s)	Area
PL1/10	Infrastrata plc (operator), Brigantes Energy Ltd., Nautical Petroleum plc, Terrain Energy Ltd.	Central Larne - Lough Neagh Basin
PL2/10	Tamboran Resources Pty Limited	Lough Allen Basin - North
PL3/10	Rathlin Energy Limited	Rathlin Basin
PL5/10	P R Singleton Limited	Rathlin Island

Petroleum Licences

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the process for considering a petroleum licence application, including what agencies are consulted on the application; and whether the public is notified when an application is made.
(AQW 5923/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Petroleum Production Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1987, as amended by the Petroleum Production (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010, and the Hydrocarbons Licensing Directive Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 provide for making and determining applications, permissible terms and conditions for granting a Petroleum Licence and the model clauses which may be incorporated in a Petroleum Licence, and specify the criteria for determining applications for Petroleum Licences.

The Guidance to Applicants, available for download from the Energy pages of the DETI website, (www.detini.gov.uk/deti-energy-index/minerals-and-petroleum/petroleum_licensing_2.htm), gives details of the process for considering a petroleum licence application but these may be summarised as follows:

1 Application is checked to verify that it conforms to the prescribed format.

2 The following aspects of the application are validated:

   a Financial viability of the applicant

   b Financial capacity of the applicant to carry out the firm components of the proposed work programme for the Initial Term of the licence.

   c Applicant's understanding of the petroleum potential of the area and the suitability of the proposed work programme.

   d Technical capacity of the applicant to carry out the firm components of the proposed work programme for the Initial Term of the licence.

   e The competence of the nominated Licence Operator to carry out the firm components of the proposed work programme for the Initial Term of the licence.

3 The applicant must also submit an environmental awareness statement which demonstrates that they possess an adequate level of awareness and competence in relation to environmental protection.

4 The applicants will be called to interview in all cases where there are competing applications for overlapping areas and at the Department's discretion where applications are non-competed.

At the time of application the applicant will not necessarily have all the required expertise available in-house or have engaged contractors and consultants to provide this expertise. Likewise, the Department does not require the Licensee to demonstrate the financial and technical capacity and operator competence to carry out contingent parts of the work programme, such as drilling an exploration well, which rely on positive outcomes from preceding phases of exploration, until the Licensee has made the decision that they wish to proceed with these operations.

Consultation takes place after the Department has carried out this process and has determined that the application meets all the criteria set out in the Regulations. At this stage DETI notifies the following list of organisations of its intention to grant a petroleum licence and invites them to make representations to the Department:

- NI Tourist Board
- The National Trust
- NIE plc
- British Telecom
- Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety
- Northern Ireland Environment Agency - NIEA
- Northern Ireland Office
- Department of Environment - Planning Service
- Invest NI
- Department of Employment and Learning
- Office of First and Deputy First Minister
- Northern Ireland Water
- Roads Service
- Department of Social Development
- Royal Society Protection of Birds (RSPB)
- District Council(s)

The public are notified by way of two consecutive newspaper advertisements in at least two local newspapers.

The proposed licences are also subject to a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) by DETI, before they are granted, to determine their potential impact on Natura 2000 sites. At this stage the initial screening stage may return a Finding of No Significant Effect because the exploration activities are not fixed in time or space at the time of application. However, the HRA process remains active throughout the Licence term and further assessments are carried out when the Licensee submits firm exploration work proposals to DETI for approval.

Petroleum Licences

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how Ministerial oversight and accountability is exercised within her Department in relation to the granting of petroleum licences.
(AQW 5924/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Details of the process for the granting of petroleum licences are given in the Answer to AQW5923/11-15. Standard Departmental procedures ensure conformity with these regulations.

I have no direct involvement in the process, but expect my officials to keep me informed of developments as necessary.

Cash for Gold Shops

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has any plans to introduce regulations on cash for gold shops.
(AQW 5966/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Consumers who wish to sell their unwanted gold to traders for cash are already protected by a number of pieces of legislation including the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008, The Enterprise Act 2002 and the Weighing Equipment (Non-Automatic Weighing Machines) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 as amended.

I have no plans to introduce to any further legislation at this stage.

Energy Efficiency Measures: Local Businesses

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for his assessment of the amount of money local business could save if they were to take advantage of energy efficiency measures, given that a recent survey claimed that some £7.7 billion could be saved if businesses became more energy efficient.
(AQW 5968/11-15)

Mrs Foster: For clarity the saving figure mentioned in the question is based on a survey of 1,167 small UK businesses which was undertaken by the energy supply company "E.ON". E.ON's research claims that collectively the UK's SME population of 4.8 million businesses could save £7.7 billion by becoming more energy efficient with individual businesses having the potential to save up to £2000 each. E.ON released a press statement about the findings of its research: http://pressreleases.eon-uk.com/blogs/eonukpressreleases/archive/2011/10/24/1753.aspx

I would, however, certainly agree that there is merit in encouraging and supporting SME's to adopt energy efficiency measures and practices in Northern Ireland – measures and practices that would not only increase the productivity of the region collectively but also help individual companies remain competitive in the current stringent economic climate.

Invest NI has provided significant funding and resource for energy efficiency support to businesses for almost ten years and despite the fact that there is less potential now than in 2002 to drive energy cost reduction Invest NI has plans to achieve some £18 million of resource efficiency savings, including energy efficiency savings of around £9 million, in industry between now and 2014/15. Invest NI has planned for example to provide an additional £3 million over the next three years to an interest-free Energy Efficiency Loan Fund that will help businesses install energy efficient equipment and energy-saving technology. Some £8.5 million has accumulated in this fund from previous Invest NI funding and it is expected this additional funding will result in some £1.7 million of savings being achieved each year over the following 15 years.

To place the scale of energy savings to which the Member's question refers in context: the total energy use by the business sector, comprising around 86,000 businesses, is estimated to be of the order of £720 million each year – so there would appear to be scope to continue to achieve significant energy savings in businesses here and with this in mind I would encourage businesses - either individually or collectively through representative organisations, to avail of the support on energy and resource efficiency provided by Invest NI.

Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 5333/11-15, what action she intends to take to encourage domestic energy suppliers, other than Power NI, to subsidise home insulation products through the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme, given that all current energy efficiency projects are means-tested and are, therefore, of no benefit to middle-income families.
(AQW 6012/11-15)

Mrs Foster: NISEP is run by the Utility Regulator and is therefore outside the purview of DETI. 80% of the NISEP budget over the three years to 2012/13 is targeted at vulnerable households, but the remaining 20% is available for non-fuel-poor household and small business schemes.

DETI, in partnership with DSD which has primary responsibility for domestic energy efficiency, is currently considering a further energy efficiency measure in order to comply with the potential targets under the proposed new Energy Efficiency Directive.

Corporation Tax

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of the proposed job losses at Aviva in the Republic of Ireland, the relocation of some of these jobs and the company's plans to move its European hub to a higher corporation tax jurisdiction, for her assessment of the actual and durable attractions of a lower corporation tax regime, in the context of other relevant factors such as wage levels, influencing business location.
(AQW 6019/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Research undertaken by my Department and the independent Economic Advisory Group, chaired by Kate Baker, both demonstrate that a lower corporation tax in Northern Ireland would have a positive and material impact on the local economy.

It was on this basis that the draft Economic Strategy includes a key commitment to ensure that Northern Ireland gets the powers to vary the corporate tax rate in a timely and affordable manner. This commitment is also reflected within the draft Programme for Government and we recently hosted discussions with UK Ministers in progressing towards this objective.

However, it is also recognised that a lower corporation tax by itself is not enough and that we must continue to improve the Northern Ireland competitive position in a range of areas. Therefore, within the draft Economic Strategy, we also plan to further develop skills, strengthen innovation and R&D, support local SMEs to develop chain linkages, enhance our infrastructure and provide targeted promotion and support.

Industrial Land: Magherafelt

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 2755/11-15, in relation to the land at (i) Creagh; and (ii) Station Road how much is (a) available for development; and (b) already occupied.
(AQW 6024/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI holds a total of 72.17 acres at its Creagh and Station Road Industrial estates.

Most of this land has already been leased or allocated with 27.10 acres remaining available for qualifying businesses.

The table below provides a breakdown on the location of the available land.

Industrial Estate	Land Holding (Acres)*	Land Available (Acres)*
Creagh	54.2	27.1
Station Road	17.97	0
Total	**72.17**	**27.1**

*Figures are correct as at 30th September 2011

Industrial Land: Magherafelt

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 2755/11-15, whether the land is exclusively for the use of InvestNI clients, or whether it is available for wider base.
(AQW 6025/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI has a relatively modest land holding of approximately 760 acres available across Northern Ireland which is held for industrial development purposes.

This land is available to those companies that meet criteria including turnover and quantity of business outside Northern Ireland. The company must also have a robust, approved business case and a demonstrable immediate property need.

Common Arrangements for Gas

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in relation to the Common Arrangements for Gas, for her assessment of whether the Republic of Ireland's authorities remain committed to this project; and how the Republic of Ireland's austerity measures will impact on implementation.
(AQW 6046/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Regulators and Transmission System Operators continue with work under the policy direction of the Department and the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources to complete the CAG project. The timetable for this complex work remains under review in light of the European Council's decision in February 2011 to advance completion of the Internal Market in gas by 2014, and further work on a single balancing zone for gas.

This will allow the regulators to deliver the CAG project in the most cost effective way, and in the interests of consumers.

Common Arrangements for Gas

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the perceived benefits to gas customers from the proposed Common Arrangements for Gas have altered; and whether the projected savings of £22m over 20 years still stand.
(AQW 6047/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The expected high level strategic and operational benefits from the Common Arrangements for Gas project have not altered significantly, and currently demonstrate a net present value of £10.6 million over the next 10 years from efficiency and other quantifiable savings.

Gas Transmission: Cross-border Protocols

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when the cross-border protocols for gas transmission will be implemented; and what benefits will they yield for gas customers.
(AQW 6048/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The timetable for implementing the Common Arrangement for Gas project and its associated protocols is currently under review to allow for additional work by the Regulatory Authorities and to coincide with actions necessary to integrate national markets in the European Union's Internal Market in gas by 2014.

Arrangements will remove barriers to transport and trade in gas, bring operational efficiencies, and enhance investment confidence to develop strategic gas infrastructure. This will improve security of supply and network resilience to gas emergencies.

Petroleum Drilling in Fermanagh

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) where drilling has taken place in Co. Fermanagh for the purpose of petroleum extraction or exploration; (ii) what consent was required and given for this drilling; (iii) to what depth each of the bore holes went; (iv) the width of each of the bore holes and drill pads; (v) the make up of any structures put in place to facilitate this drilling and the long term impact on the environment and landscape; (vi) whether any of these bore holes are located in protected areas, such as Areas of Special Scientific Interest; (vii) who the landowner was in each case; (viii) whether the landowner's permission was sought and given in each case; (ix) the terms of any agreements between the contractor and the landowner; and (x) the current condition of each of these bore holes.
(AQW 6050/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

(i) No drilling has taken place for petroleum production (extraction) in Fermanagh. Drilling for petroleum exploration has taken place at the following locations:

Year	Well Name	Townland	Irish Grid	Reference	Depth (m)
1965	Big Dog No. 1	Big Dog	201865m	E 349672m N	2002
1965	Glenoo No. 1	Cornarooslan	249620m	E 341420m N	2106
1965	Owengarr No. 1	Aghaweenagh	223205m	E 326935m N	2041
1984	Slisgarrow No. 1	Conagher	202500m	E 351800m N	1999
1985	Kilcoo Cross No. 1	Cashelnadrea	196950m	E 348100m N	1910
2001	Knock Beg No. 1	Knock Beg	206258m	E 348955m N	909
2001	Mullanawinna No. 1	Greaghnagleragh	203350m	E 342220m N	986
2001	Slisgarrow No. 2	Conagher	202567m	E 351853m N	816
2001	Wind Farm No. 1	Skeahogue	224538m	E 325160m N	1352

(ii) Approval from the Department to drill was required under the Petroleum Production Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1987.

(iii) See above.

(iv) All the above were vertical holes started at 17½" diameter for the shallowest section, reducing to 12¼" diameter for the interval to the Benbulben Shale Formation and then down to either 8½" or 7⅞" for the rest of the hole. The drill pads ranged in size from a minimum of 60m x 80m (1.2 acres) to a maximum of 100m x 100m (2.5 acres).

(v) Exploration drillsites are designed and constructed to allow the safe operation of large drilling rigs and prevent damage to, or pollution of, the surrounding land. As such they commonly involve the preparation of a level area of hard-standing large enough to accommodate the rig and associated equipment, storage facilities and offices. The site will normally have a drainage system for preventing surface run-off and, in modern sites, a impermeable liner to prevent infiltration into the ground beneath the site. When the drilling has been completed the drillsite may be returned to its original state,

or the landowner may request the company to leave the hard-standing for their own use, if the conditions of any planning permission allow this. There should be little long-term impact on the environment or landscape.

(vi) None of the wellsites was located in protected areas, such as Areas of Special Scientific Interest.

(vii) This information is not available to the Department.

(viii) Yes. The company could not have proceeded without the landowner's permission.

(ix) This information is not available to the Department.

(x) All the boreholes have been plugged and abandoned in accordance with the specified abandonment programmes. The borehole is lined with steel casing which is cemented in place and it is plugged and abandoned by setting cement plugs at appropriate depths in the casing to seal off the wellbore. The casing is cut off at ground surface and a steel plate welded onto the top of the casing.

Wind Farm: South Down

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to provide details of the location for the proposed wind farm in South Down as discussed on the UTV News on 15 December 2011.
(AQW 6095/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Crown Estate has defined an area from south of Strangford Lough to the marine line at Carlingford Lough for a possible 600MW offshore wind farm as shown on the map, copy attached. At this stage in the process, it is not possible to refine the location further.

The Crown Estate will, in due course, offer an Exclusivity Agreement to a preferred developer who would carry out further studies, surveys and initial consultations with stakeholders to define a preferred project area, which is likely to be smaller than the area identified in the map.

Department of the Environment

Planning Applications: Third Party Appeals

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of the Environment whether he intends to introduce third party right of appeal to the planning process.
(AQW 4323/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): The reforms to the planning system contained within the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 will enhance the rights and opportunities of third parties who wish to become involved in the planning process when planning powers transfer to local government. In advance of that transfer of powers to councils I am planning to bring forward legislation in the Assembly that will accelerate the implementation of a number of those reforms, to be administered by the Department. These will include the development of a Statement of Community Involvement, setting out opportunities for interested parties to become involved in development management and other planning control issues, and a requirement on developers to engage in pre-application community involvement in advance of submitting an application for major developments.

I have asked for further information on third party appeals, particularly as part of a potential fundamental review of planning policy and structures.

Vehicle Registration Certificates V5C(NI)

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment, following the issue of the new red Vehicle Registration Certificates V5C(NI) as a result of the theft of a number of blank blue V5C(NI)s, (i) where and when the theft took place; (ii) if the new V5C(NI) only applies to Northern Ireland; and (iii) to detail the estimated cost of issuing new V5C(NI)s.
(AQW 4606/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Vehicle licensing and registration are excepted matters for which responsibility rests with the Secretary of State for Transport. However, it is administered in Northern Ireland by the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) under the terms of a formal agreement between my Department and the Department for Transport, represented by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) in Swansea.

The V5C vehicle registration documents were stolen after being returned to DVLA's printing contractors for secure destruction in 2006.

The stolen blue V5C documents were for use by vehicle keepers in Great Britain only: no NI documents were stolen. However, all V5C documents, including those used in NI, are being replaced.

The cost of issuing the new red V5C to NI customers, which is borne by DVLA in Swansea, is estimated at £200,000. I have asked for an update on the outcome of any police investigations.

Wind Turbines: Noise Assessment Guidance (ETSU-R-97)

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the noise assessment guidance for wind turbines ETSU-R-97, and whether this guidance will be revised.
(AQW 4800/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In common with the planning policy approach in England, Scotland and Wales, Planning Policy Statement 18 'Renewable Energy' states that 'The Assessment and Rating of Noise from Wind Farms' (ETSU-R-97) devised on behalf of DECC should be used to assess and rate noise from wind energy developments here. This methodology offers a reasonable degree of protection to wind farm neighbours, without placing unreasonable restrictions on wind farm development. I am supportive of wind farm turbine applications, as a key element of renewable going forward, subject to appropriate requirements.

Recent research has suggested some inconsistency in the application of ETSU-R-97. DECC will issue best practice guidance for consultation in the Spring. I will consider the issue further at that time.

DOE: Staff Mileage Claims

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the cost to his Department of staff mileage claims in each of the last two financial years.
(AQW 4911/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The costs incurred by the Department of the Environment for staff mileage claims in 2009-10 and 2010-11 amounted to £950,401 and £538,955 respectively.

I have made it clear to senior officials that there is a major obligation to bear down on internal costs, including mileage, travel, conference, and accommodation (etc.). I have asked for a quarterly update on all these internal costs and patterns therein.

Listed Buildings

Mr Givan asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the process used by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to list a building; and who takes the final decision to list or de-list a building.
(AQW 5084/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency has published a document on its website which outlines the listing process. This is attached for your information.

In regard to the final decision this document states that:

> *'The Director of Built Heritage is an authorised officer of sufficient seniority to sign off legal papers on behalf of the Department.*
>
> *He is presented with a recommendation for listing along with a summary of the various consultation responses and other correspondence on the case. He may also have received direct communication on the case from others. Before arriving at a final decision, relative to the legislative test, he may choose to consult with other senior Departmental colleagues. This is rarely required, but may be appropriate for high profile or particularly sensitive cases.*
>
> *'…..With the signature of the Director a final decision to list has been made and the list is formally altered. The Departmental Seal is affixed to the new list entry and a record is placed on, or modified at, the Land Registry.'*

When proposing to delist a building, as is the case with listing, the department is obliged to consult the Historic Buildings Council and the appropriate district council. If the final decision is to delist, then the formal process is carried out as detailed above, and the Department will serve a notice on the owner/occupier to the effect that the building has ceased to be listed, with an explanation for the decision.

Final decisions to list or de-list buildings are normally taken by relevant officials in the Department. However any such decisions can be referred to the Minister for consideration and final decision.

Recycling: Ban on Waste Going to Landfill or Incineration

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether he would consider introducing a ban on waste collected for recycling going to landfill or incineration.
(AQW 5111/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Waste collected for recycling can be rejected at several stages within the recycling process:

- at the kerbside, identified as either non-recyclable or contaminated;
- rejected at the "gate" due to waste management facility acceptance criteria;
- during recycling, fractions of the collected material may be segregated out as non-recyclable or contaminated;
- during processing of the recyclate into a new product, recyclate may fail quality control criteria for the raw material feed.

The rejected material at each of these stages has to be either landfilled or be sent to an energy from waste facility.

The Department believes that a ban on waste collected for recycling going to landfill or incineration is not necessary at this time but I have asked for advice to determine the best way forward. Meanwhile the Department is developing other levers to

encourage recycling, improve recyclate quality and develop the market for recyclates (including plastics on the island of Ireland) in conjunction with existing levers for landfill diversion, such as the landfill tax.

Planning Applications: Article 31 Determinations

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how many Article 31 planning decisions have been issued since he has come into office.
(AQW 5267/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Three Article 31 planning decisions have been issued since my appointment as Minister of the Environment on 5 May 2011.

My officials in the strategic Planning Division are currently progressing a number of Article 31 applications on which a report and recommendation will be made to me in the near future.

Councils: Funding

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the level of funding allocated to each council in the current financial year.
(AQW 5275/11-15)

Mr Attwood: District councils receive funding in the form of General Grant which is made up of two elements, de-rating and resources. The de-rating element of General Grant compensates district councils for loss of rate income due to the statutory de-rating of certain properties. The Resources element is an actual grant based on the needs and wealth of district councils and provides financial support to those councils whose needs exceed their wealth.

In addition, the Environment Group (comprising the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and Environmental Policy Division) also provides funding to district councils in relation to listed building grants, air quality management grants, noise act grants, waste grants and grants under the natural heritage grant programme.

The level of funding allocated to each council in the current financial year is set out in the table below.

District Council	De-rating £	Resources £	Environment Group £	Total £
Antrim	1,111,757	0	314,471	1,426,228
Ards	581,641	833,877	68,605	1,484,123
Armagh	749,782	1,529,979	248,355	2,528,116
Ballymena	1,336,101	11,646	515,658	1,863,405
Ballymoney	273,533	1,054,727	167,257	1,495,517
Banbridge	446,652	1,066,844	136,565	1,650,061
Belfast	4,158,774	0	1,019,055	5,177,829
Carrickfergus	559,508	580,088	32,731	1,172,327
Castlereagh	661,176	0	171,489	832,665
Coleraine	638,513	0	154,556	793,069
Cookstown	812,925	521,029	415,744	1,749,698
Craigavon	2,053,926	1,032,306	172,079	3,258,311
Derry	1,470,304	1,316,270	591,634	3,378,208
Down	502,008	1,335,200	418,465	2,255,673
Dungannon & South Tyrone	1,611,339	802,572	302,225	2,716,136
Fermanagh	784,605	885,858	229,979	1,900,442
Larne	489,196	79,432	43,143	611,771
Limavady	220,531	1,261,120	228,628	1,710,279
Lisburn	1,761,727	0	180,589	1,942,316
Magherafelt	772,216	1,064,479	127,552	1,964,247

District Council	De-rating £	Resources £	Environment Group £	Total £
Moyle	166,823	468,250	49,455	684,528
Newry & Mourne	1,206,364	1,503,192	412,481	3,122,037
Newtownabbey	1,324,687	0	243,002	1,567,689
North Down	546,537	0	171,263	717,800
Omagh	580,866	1,216,020	322,241	2,119,127
Strabane	309,151	1,764,111	157,542	2,230,804
Total	**25,130,642**	**18,327,000**	**6,894,764**	**50,352,406**

Further details of the grants provided by the Environment Group are shown below.

Table 2 Environment Group Grant Details

Council	Listed Building Grant to Council	Listed Building Grant to Churches in the Council Area	Listed Building Grant to Private Owners in the Council Area	Local Air Quality Grants	Noise Act Grant	Rethink Waste	Waste Management Grant	Natutal Heritage Grant	Total
Antrim	£146,870	£19,620	£565	£5,403	£0	£109,740	£32,273	£0	£314,471
Ards	£0	£0	£21,955	£0	£0	£0	£46,650	£0	£68,605
Armagh	£50,000	£0	£74,880	£51,447	£0	£0	£72,028	£0	£248,355
Ballymena	£0	£0	£31,915	£28,412	£0	£417,450	£37,881	£0	£515,658
Ballymoney	£0	£109,350	£0	£1,786	£0	£0	£56,121	£0	£167,257
Banbridge	£0	£67,820	£540	£0	£0	£10,000	£58,205	£0	£136,565
Belfast	£15,672	£50,000	£695,470	£86,871	£10,750	£0	£160,292	£0	£1,019,055
Carrickfergus	£0	£0	£5,570	£3,180	£0	£0	£23,981	£0	£32,731
Castlereagh	£0	£8,955	£23,325	£53,990	£0	£0	£39,969	£45,250	£171,489
Coleraine	£0	£0	£0	£6,383	£0	£19,000	£104,173	£25,000	£154,556
Cookstown	£0	£44,925	£171,010	£3,307	£0	£152,000	£44,502	£0	£415,744
Craigavon	£0	£0	£10,280	£0	£0	£48,300	£113,499	£0	£172,079
Derry	£0	£90,780	£203,623	£52,354	£0	£0	£201,377	£43,500	£591,634
Down	£0	£0	£70,640	£1,590	£0	£200,000	£42,235	£104,000	£418,465
Dungannon	£0	£0	£56,258	£0	£0	£154,000	£69,967	£22,000	£302,225
Fermanagh	£0	£0	£125,850	£1,188	£0	£11,426	£76,515	£15,000	£229,979
Larne	£0	£0	£20,785	£3,447	£0	£0	£18,911	£0	£43,143
Limavady	£0	£0	£150,765	£16,239	£0	£0	£61,624	£0	£228,628
Lisburn	£0	£17,890	£73,855	£18,571	£0	£0	£70,273	£0	£180,589
Magherafelt	£0	£0	£41,450	£4,121	£0	£0	£81,981	£0	£127,552
Moyle	£0	£0	£16,300	£1,976	£0	£0	£31,179	£0	£49,455
Newry & Mourne	£0	£0	£0	£83,951	£0	£143,750	£121,138	£63,642	£412,481
Newtownabbey	£0	£0	£0	£40,581	£0	£152,550	£49,871	£0	£243,002

Council	Listed Building Grant to Council	Listed Building Grant to Churches in the Council Area	Listed Building Grant to Private Owners in the Council Area	Local Air Quality Grants	Noise Act Grant	Rethink Waste	Waste Management Grant	Natutal Heritage Grant	Total
North Down	£0	£0	£73,237	£3,362	£0	£17,000	£47,664	£30,000	£171,263
Omagh	£0	£0	£16,525	£1,570	£0	£225,000	£64,146	£15,000	£322,241
Strabane	£0	£56,710	£18,325	£8,962	£0	£0	£73,545	£0	£157,542
Totals	**£212,542**	**£466,050**	**£1,903,123**	**£478,691**	**£10,750**	**£1,660,216**	**£1,800,000**	**£363,392**	**£6,894,764**

Shared Future

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of the Environment (i) to outline the measures he has taken since coming into office. or plans to take, to promote a shared future; and (ii) whether he will consider implementing a policy appraisal whereby his Department will screen and policy-proof all policies and spending decisions for the impact on good relations and the creation of a shared future. **(AQW 5276/11-15)**

Mr Attwood:

(i) I am committed to ensuring the Department proactively promotes a shared future, and as such, measures to promote a shared future include Planning Reform; Community Planning; and access to shared space through the management of country parks, countryside centres and nature reserves.

Planning Reform

The ongoing programme to reform the planning system includes a range of initiatives which will help promote a shared future.

The transfer of planning powers to district councils will mean that spatial planning will be a key function of local government putting councils at the heart of delivering development proposals for their communities. Operating planning functions in conjunction with other existing and proposed council functions will bring a positive and proactive approach to place shaping and delivering the new community planning responsibilities. Functions will include forward planning through the local development plan and community plan with effective implementation through development management, regeneration, tourism, economic development, building control and environmental health. In my view, this should be informed by core values including common hopes and a shared future.

I propose to consult next year on subordinate legislation flowing from the Planning (Northern Ireland) Act 2011 which will require future councils to set out in a statement of community involvement how they will involve everyone with an interest in the area in the planning process. This will enable early community engagement on spatial local development plans that will show how council areas will change in the future. I also intend to consult on subordinate legislation which will require prospective applicants to consult the local community before submitting major planning applications. This will ensure effective engagement takes place with the community to help shape development proposals at the earliest stage and before they are finalised and an application submitted. This inclusive approach will involve collaboration with councillors, developers, local residents and other stakeholders to ensure that the opportunities presented by development proposals can help make better places with shared benefits on the ground that realise council community plans.

As an interim measure, ahead of the transfer of planning powers to councils, I intend to introduce a Planning Reform Bill which will include measures for pre-application community consultation, as well as a duty on the Department to further sustainable development and promote or improve well-being.

Community planning

I will bring forward a Local Government (Reorganisation) Bill which will include provisions to introduce council-led community planning. The community planning process will provide a framework whereby district councils will act in partnership with departments, statutory agencies and other sectors operating in their area to develop and deliver a shared Vision for the well-being of the area. The development of the shared Vision will be informed and supported by effective engagement with the local community.

In taking forward their community planning duties district councils must be effective local champions, responding to the aspirations and concerns of their communities, guiding in partnership with other agencies the future development of their area. In providing the leadership role in the process councils will be responsible for developing innovative and creative ways of ensuring there is effective and genuine engagement with all communities.

Effective, inclusive local democracy, led by elected representatives, which has as its focus the development and delivery of improved public services will provide a positive force that can improve outcomes and the quality of life for everyone living and working in a council area. Increased civic participation in the process for planning the delivery of local services will help to tackle

exclusion and play a significant role in building a Shared Future at local level, promoting the sharing of services and spaces, in the context of taking the programme for cohesion, sharing and integration forward.

Access to Shared Spaces

The NIEA provides access to shared spaces through the management of eight country parks, 17 countryside centres and over 40 sites managed as nature reserves. In addition, NIEA is responsible for 190 State Care Monuments. Over 2 million visitors are recorded annually at NIEA sites and properties. Access to most of these sites is free of charge.

In addition to this, NIEA carry out the following functions:

Events

NIEA currently provides an extensive programme of events across the many sites and properties in its care. These events are promoted through the NIEA website, and through partnership arrangements with local councils and Tourist Information Centres. The events provide all sections of society with the opportunity to access sites, free of charge, and learn more about our shared environment and heritage.

NIEA contributes to public pride in relation to NI's shared heritage through its annual events programme. The 'European Heritage Open Days' (EHOD) demonstrates the common heritage of NI and Europe through encouraging buildings, normally closed to the public, to open up to visitors. This has had an enthusiastic response with over 58,000 people visiting EHOD properties this year. Other events such as the Agency's 'Archaeology Days' provide opportunities to learn about the complexity of our shared heritage.

Corporate Social Responsibility

NIEA has recently introduced a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policy to empower and enable its staff to have a positive impact on society beyond our normal work. The Agency supports staff who are involved in a wide range of charitable activities that enhance both society and the environment. The Agency recognises that it has an important role to play in providing corporate support to local community based charities whose activities and aspirations align with the Agency's business objectives and have the potential to contribute to a shared future.

Sponsorships

NIEA sponsors a number of third party organisations to provide support to key initiatives and events that are aligned to our objectives and allow us to engage with the wider community. A couple of examples are given below:

Arena Network

NIEA sponsors the ARENA Network, part of Business in the Community (BITC), which seeks to promote corporate social responsibility amongst its company membership. BITC includes 240 organisations in Northern Ireland and their main focus is on creating sustainable businesses and building sustainable communities. The Agency has recently agreed a three year partnership agreement with ARENA to support this on-going work.

Eco-Schools

NIEA provides financial support to the Eco-Schools programme which is run by TIDY Northern Ireland, an environmental charity. Any school can join the Eco-schools programme for free and it makes tackling sustainable issues manageable and easy for all schools. This year, the Agency has increased its financial support to the programme which seeks to involve 1000 schools by March 2014. Eco-Schools aim to develop responsible attitudes and commitment in pupils. Children and schools are encouraged to seek ways to improve the environments of their schools and their local communities. Cluster groups gather local authorities, NGOs, Schools and other delivery partners to enable them to work together to deliver the programme jointly and to do so on a localised basis which relates to their community.

(ii) Under the Northern Ireland Act 1998, all departments are required to fulfill the statutory duty to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. In this regard, all departments are required to consider how all policy development and spending decisions contribute to promoting good relations.

The approach to mainstreaming good relations considerations into policy development and resource allocation will also be considered as part of the development of the final Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy.

The Department also reports annually to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland on the implementation of Section 75 of the NI Act 1998.

Local Government: Transition Change Managers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment which councils have retained the services of a Transition Change Manager. **(AQW 5314/11-15)**

Mr Attwood: Out of eleven council groupings, five have retained the services of Transition Change Managers. These are:

- Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon

- Ards and North Down (Manager used exclusively by Ards Borough council)
- Ballymoney, Coleraine Limavady and Moyle
- Belfast City Council
- Down and Newry & Mourne

The council grouping of Derry City and Strabane District did not appoint a Change Manager and the transition duties were covered by existing staff.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment what was the level of greenhouse gas emissions in (i)1990; (ii) 2008; (iii) 2009; and (iv) 2010.
(AQW 5372/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

NORTHERN IRELAND GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS LEVELS

Year	1990	2008	2009
Kilotonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent	24,483	21,227	19,508

The figures above are drawn from work carried out for the Greenhouse Gas Inventory Report for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Report which is compiled annually on behalf of the London Government's Department for Energy and Climate Change and the devolved administrations presents the latest estimates of greenhouse gas emissions inventories. The most recent report was published in September 2011 for the period 1990 to 2009. This shows that greenhouse gas emissions in Northern Ireland were around 20% lower in 2009 compared with 1990 levels.1

The 2010 figures are due to be published in July 2012.

Environmental Impact of Waste

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment how he intends to reduce the environmental impact of the (i) household; and (ii) industrial waste that is generated.
(AQW 5374/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The environmental impacts from waste are reduced by diverting waste from landfill and moving the management of waste up the waste hierarchy to waste prevention.

The Department also has a number of initiatives to improve waste prevention and recycling. Under the Rethink Waste Programme, the Department is communicating behaviour change messages to encourage waste prevention, reuse and recycling and also provides a range of incentives to increase levels of reuse and recycling. These incentives range from the provision of financial assistance, through the Rethink Waste Capital and Revenue Funds, to technical advisory support to local councils and businesses to improve the quality and efficiency of collection and recycling services offered to households and businesses, resulting in increases in the collection of quality materials for reuse and recycling.

The Department has recently consulted on a new recycling policy which includes a new, more ambitious target for the recycling of local authority collected municipal waste. There is potential for Northern Ireland to achieve municipal recycling rates in the region of 60% over the next 10 years – assuming that the 50% household recycling target for 2020 set in the Waste Framework Directive will be achieved as a key element of the progress towards the municipal targets.

There are also initiatives in place to develop the markets for recyclates and therefore provide the 'pull' for recycling of both household and C&I waste. This includes close working with Ireland, through the North South Market Development Steering Group, to assist in developing the markets for recyclates on an all island basis.

Septic Tanks

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment for an estimate of the number of septic tanks in each constituency.
(AQW 5406/11-15)

Mr Attwood: It is not possible to give an estimate of the number of septic tanks in each constituency as consent records are not stored in this format. A high level estimate of the number of consented systems in each Council area is given below;

Council Area	Estimate	Council Area	Estimate
Fermanagh	11250	Dungannon & South Tyrone	5000
Omagh	6500	Craigavon	1850

1 http://www.doeni.gov.uk/ghg_inventory_statistical_bulletin_2009.pdf

Council Area	Estimate	Council Area	Estimate
Strabane	8700	Lisburn	2400
Derry	8650	Belfast	1000
Limavady	2600	North Down	340
Coleraine	6050	Ards	2550
Moyle	2000	Down	7250
Ballymoney	7350	Newry & Mourne	6050
Ballymena	6650	Banbridge	1750
Larne	3100	Magherafelt	3100
Carrickfergus	405	Armagh	3400
Newtownabbey	1700	Castlereagh	155
Antrim	5350		
Cookstown	4850	**Total**	**110,000**

NIEA estimates that there are a further 12-15,000 unconsented septic tank systems in Northern Ireland. It would not be possible to estimate the proportion of these in each constituency.

Bangor Castle Leisure Centre

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the sale of Bangor Castle Leisure Centre for £1.5 million to the private sector and the value for money for the ratepayers of the North Down area.
(AQW 5483/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Councils are bodies corporate as defined in the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972, and as such, are independent of the Department and directly responsible for decisions regarding their own affairs.

The process of disposal of this site has been reviewed by the Northern Ireland Audit Office who concluded that at this stage, based on the evidence provided, the Council could "demonstrate that it is aware of its legal obligations in disposing of land and property and that best practice appears to have been followed to date".

I will closely monitor the sale/disposal of assets, the reasons why, the community interest, etc.

Local Government: Debt

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the current level of debt owed by each council.
(AQW 5494/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The total amount of council debt from borrowings as of 30 November 2011 is detailed in the table below.

Council	Total
Antrim	15,182,481
Ards	13,971,249
Armagh	27,605,117
Ballymena	24,436,386
Ballymoney	9,454,077
Banbridge	20,663,518
Belfast	25,852,530
Carrickfergus	21,469,985
Castlereagh	18,612,585
Coleraine	28,508,954
Cookstown	1,487,123

Council	Total
Craigavon	7,992,591
Derry	26,149,594
Down	23,928,145
Dungannon	3,481,440
Fermanagh	3,505,713
Larne	14,227,282
Limavady	12,395,920
Lisburn	18,525,881
Magherafelt	0
Moyle	8,754,809
Newry & Mourne	18,800,274
Newtownabbey	46,043,447
North Down	28,449,132
Omagh	10,213,977
Strabane	2,309,732
Total	**432,021,942**

Council Debt as of 30 November 2011

The figures confirm the scale of one of the issues around RPA i.e. the management of liabilities in respect of councils and future mergers e.g. the Fermanagh and Omagh, Derry and Strabane figures respectively.

Review of Public Administration

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail all of the responsibilities that will pass from his Department to local councils under the Reform of Public Administration.
(AQW 5507/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The issue of transferring responsibilities and functions from central government departments, including Department of Environment, to local councils will form part of the careful post-consultation assessment. I have recommended the Executive should refresh their thinking given the elapsed time and different circumstances that exist today and that the transfer of functions and responsibilities package agreed by the previous Executive in 2008 is a reasonable starting point. I am to meet a number of Ministerial colleagues in January 2012 and met the DSD Minister recently in this regard.

Discharge of Waste Water: Drumnakilly, Omagh

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the case taken against the quarry owner for legally, or illegally, discharging waste water at Drumnakilly, Omagh.
(AQW 5547/11-15)

Mr Attwood: NIEA is currently considering the evidence collected as a result of the pollution incident reported by your constituent on the 5 November 2011, with a view to a prosecution if deemed appropriate.

It is anticipated that the process of collating all the evidence, formally interviewing all parties under caution, establishing who is responsible, discussing the legal issues likely to arise with the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) and our Departmental Solicitors, and then preparing a file for consideration by PPS could will from 3-6 months.

There is however a complication in this case in that McAnenly Quarries Ltd is believed to be in receivership. Before proceeding with any enforcement action NIEA will therefore need to establish who currently has legal control of the site, and thus who to take action against .i.e. McAnenly Quarries Ltd, the receiver, or both.

I can assure you that my officials will fully investigate the pollution incident and take appropriate action in line with NIEAs published Enforcement Policy.

A37, Broad Road: Human Waste Sludge Site

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to the quarry on the A37 Broad Road, Limavady, to detail any other usage apart from a human waste sludge site; and whether any other usage impacts on the safe and effective operation of the sludge site.
(AQW 5634/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency has granted a mobile plant licence to a company to permit the storage and treatment of sewage sludge in an old quarry alongside the A37 Limavady to Coleraine Road. The mobile plant licence stipulates the boundary of the waste facility. The area of the waste site is only a portion of the overall quarry.

The licence includes a range of conditions to ensure the sludge is managed in a proper manner and fully complies with waste legislation. The licence also includes a Site Specific Working Plan. Details relating to the mobile plant licence, for example, the Site Specific Working Plan, Site boundary map etc are on the Public Register and may be viewed upon request to NIEA to arrange a suitable appointment.

The operator has an extant waste licence, however the waste facility has not been receiving or treating sewage sludge since the 13 October 20111, as sludge has been going to Belfast for incineration.

The Department is not aware of any other uses taking place at the quarry.

A37, Broad Road: Human Waste Sludge Site

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment why the Northern Ireland Environment Agency did not disclose, until the 7 December 2011, that it only used part of the disused quarry on the A37, Broad Road, Limavady, as a human waste sludge site, despite on-going concerns about the site.
(AQW 5658/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has granted a mobile plant licence to a company to permit the storage and treatment of sewage sludge in an old quarry alongside the A37 Limavady to Coleraine Road. The mobile plant licence stipulates the boundary of the waste facility. The area of the waste site is only a portion of the overall quarry. The mobile plant licence has not been modified at any time, and specifically, the boundary of the waste site has not been amended.

The licence includes a range of conditions to ensure the sludge is managed in a proper manner and fully complies with waste legislation. The licence also includes a Site Specific Working Plan.

Details relating to the mobile plant licence, for example, the Site Specific Working Plan, Site boundary map etc have been, and remain on the Public Register and may be viewed upon request to NIEA to arrange a suitable appointment. The Agency has no record of a request to date to disclose the mobile plant site licence boundary.

The operator has an extant waste licence, however the waste facility has not been receiving or treating sewage sludge since the 13 October 20111, as sludge has been going to Belfast for incineration.

Discharge Consents: Glynn River and Tributaries

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail any discharge consents issued to companies for the Glynn River, and its tributaries, over the last twelve months.
(AQW 5761/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) administers a system of discharge consents which lay down conditions relating to the quality and quantity of effluent that may be discharged. The conditions are formulated using scientific protocols which ensure that the discharge can be sustained by the receiving waterway without damage to the aquatic environment and without breaching national or EU Directive standards.

NIEA has issued 2 discharge consents to companies for discharges to the Glynn River and its tributaries in the last twelve months.

Both consents were issued to Bord Gáis Energy (Northern Ireland) for discharges of site drainage from an exploratory borehole site into the Raloo Water, a tributary of the Glynn River, near Glenoe.

Taxi Fare and Taximeter Regulations

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment whether he can offer an assurance that action will not be taken until the consultation on taxi fare and taximeter regulations has been completed and assessed.
(AQW 5828/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The consultation on taxi fare and taximeter regulations was released on 12 November and runs until 17 February 2012. Once all the responses have been collated and analysed I will decide on the most appropriate action required to deliver a fair and robust regulatory system for taxis. Until then, the Department will not have the legal cover to take actions not currently covered under the law.

Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the reasons for the delay in producing regulations for the implementation of the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010.
(AQW 5871/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Six sets of subordinate regulations are required to implement the Goods Vehicle (Licensing of Operators) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010. Work on the regulations is well advanced, with four sets already drafted and public consultations on the last two sets of regulations recently issued. The Department plans to bring forward all six sets of regulations to the Assembly Environment Committee in March 2012, with the rollout of the new arrangements commencing operationally from April 2012.

This implementation plan is in line with the timetable previously indicated by the Department and shows that there has been no significant delay to the implementation of the Act – and indeed that there has been considerable progress made towards it.

Planning Regulations: Storage of Slurry and Chicken Litter

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the planning regulations for the storage of slurry and chicken litter; and (ii) what action his Department takes if any breaches of regulations occur.
(AQW 5950/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Part 6 of Schedule 1 to the Planning (General Development) Order (Northern Ireland) 1993 (GDO) grants permitted development rights for a range of agricultural building and operations subject to a number of limitations.

Agricultural permitted development provisions provide for a building or structure of up to 300 square metres which may be a slurry tank or other structure to store slurry or chicken litter.

If a building or structure does not qualify for agricultural permitted development rights by virtue of Part 6 of the GDO, a planning application will be required.

Where a planning application is required and submitted the Department will pay particular regard to current policy set out in PPS1: General Principles and PPS 21: Sustainable Development in the Countryside. The Department will consult the Environmental Health Department of the Council in relation to potential nuisance; and, NIEA – Agricultural Regulations Team in relation to water quality and compliance with the Control of Pollution (Silage, Slurry & Agricultural Fuel Oil) Regulations (NI) 2003. Additional consultations may also be required depending on the site specific circumstances. Each application will be assessed on its own individual merits in the application policy taking account of the particular circumstances of each case.

Depending on the scale and nature of the application it may also be necessary to obtain a permit under the Pollution Prevention and Control (NI) Regulations 2003, which is issued by the Industrial Pollution & Radiochemical Inspectorate (IPRI) within the NIEA.

Proposals involving uses for intensive agricultural purposes may be subject to assessment under the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999 (the Regulations).

In determining the most appropriate course of action in response to alleged breaches of planning control, DOE Planning will take into account the extent of the breach and its potential impact on the environment.

Wind Turbines: Planning Applications

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of planning applications for wind turbines in the (i) North Down Borough Council; and (ii) Ards Borough Council areas that have been (a) approved; and (b) refused in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6000/11-15)

Mr Attwood: For the last 3 year period 4 wind turbines were approved in North Down (no refusals). In Ards 18 were approved (1 refusal).

The accompanying tables show the figures for each year (previously provided under AQW 5261/11-15).

The following applications have been received and decisions issued.

Table 1: Single Turbine applications received for Ards and North Down Local Government Districts, 2006/07 to 2010/11

	Ards	North Down
2006/07	3	2
2007/08	9	2
2008/09	9	1
2009/10	4	2
2010/11	2	5
Total	**27**	**12**

Source: Planning NI

Table 2: Single Turbine application decisions for Ards and North Down Local Government Districts, 2006/07 to 2010/11

	Ards		North Down	
	Approved	**Refused**	**Approved**	**Refused**
2006/07	4	0	1	0
2007/08	6	0	2	0
2008/9	11	1	1	0
2009/10	5	0	2	0
2010/11	2	0	1	0
Total	**28**	**1**	**7**	**0**

Source: Planning NI

Planning is currently engaged in an exercise to cleanse and enhance the quality of historic data held which relates to renewable energy applications. As such the data provided in this document may be subject to later revision.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Civil Service: Vacant Posts

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number of vacant posts in the Civil Service, broken down by grade; and (ii) how many of these posts he intends to fill in this financial year.
(AQW 3574/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The information requested is set out in the attached table and sets out the posts to be filled by a variety of means including promotion, recruitment and internal transfers.

The number of funded vacant posts (FTE)* in the Civil Service at 20 October 2011

Grade Description	Number of Vacant Posts Departments are Planning to Fill	Number of Vacant Posts Departments are Planning to Fill this Financial Year
Administrative Assistant	11.6	11.6
Administrative Officer	71.81	68.81
Agricultural Economist	1	1
Agricultural Inspector II	6	6
Assistant Accommodation Manager	1	1
Assistant Chief Officer of Social Services	1	0
Assistant Economist	1	1
Assistant Scientific Officer	6	6
Assistant Statistician	12	12
Careers Advisor	2	2
Careers Service Manager	1	1
Careworker	6	6
Chief Nursing Officer	1	1
Conservator F	2	2
Curatorial D	1	1
Curatorial F	2	1
Deputy Chief Dental Officer	1	1

Grade Description	Number of Vacant Posts Departments are Planning to Fill	Number of Vacant Posts Departments are Planning to Fill this Financial Year
Deputy Chief Fisheries Officer	2	2
Deputy Principal	39	38
Deputy Principal – Accountant	20	20
Deputy Principal – Assistant Director	2	2
Deputy Principal – Economists	3	3
Deputy Principal – Statistician	2	2
Executive Officer 1	33	28
Executive Officer 2	199.33	170.67
Executive Officer – Instructor	3	3
Executive Officer – Psychology Assistant	6	6
Fisheries Officer 2	2	2
Grade 6 – General Service	4	4
Grade 6 – Planning Manager	1	1

The number of funded vacant posts in the Civil Service at 20 October 2011 (Continued)

Grade Description*	Number of Vacant Posts Departments are Planning to Fill	Number of Vacant Posts Departments are Planning to Fill this Financial Year
Grade 7 – Accountant	13	13
Grade 7 – Director	1	1
Grade 7 – General Service	18	18
Grade 7 – Health Professional Officer	1	1
Grade 7 – Principal Legal Officer	2	1
Grade 7 – Social Policy Adviser	1	1
Grade 7 – Statistician	5	5
Graduate Trainee Valuer	12	12
Higher Professional & Technical Officer	7	7
Higher Psychologist	10	10
Higher Scientific Officer	20	20
Industrial Staff	39	39
Information Communication Technology (ICT) Level 1	2	2
Information Communication Technology (ICT) Level 2	2	0
Information Communication Technology (ICT) Level 3	3	1
Information Communication Technology (ICT) Level 4	3	3
Information Communication Technology (ICT) Level 5	8	8

Grade Description*	Number of Vacant Posts Departments are Planning to Fill	Number of Vacant Posts Departments are Planning to Fill this Financial Year
Information Communication Technology (ICT) Level 6	3	3
Information Communication Technology (ICT) Level 7	1	1
Inspector Grade III/IV	11	11
Inspector Group 1	17	17
Inspector Group 2	12.8	12.8
Inspector Group 4	3	3
Librarian	1	1
Night Support Worker	4	4
Nursing Officer	1	1
Officer of Social Services	1	1
Personal Secretary	1	1
Principal Inspector (Health & Safety)	1	1
Principal Professional & Technical Officer	1	1
Professional & Technical Officer	7	7

The number of funded vacant posts in the Civil Service at 20 October 2011 (Continued)

Grade Description*	Number ff Vacant Posts Departments are Planning to Fill	Number of Vacant Posts Departments are Planning to Fill this Financial Year
Scientific Officer	9	9
Senior Civil Service – Grade 2 level	1	1
Senior Civil Service – Grade 3 level	1	1
Senior Civil Service – Grade 5 level	10	6
Senior Medical Officer	1	1
Senior Portal Inspector	1	1
Senior Principal Veterinary Officer	1	1
Senior Professional and Technical Officer	4	4
Senior Psychologist	1	1
Senior Scientific Officer	13	13
Senior Teacher	1	1
Staff Officer	48	44
Staff Officer – Accountant	3	3
Staff Officer – Economist	1	1
Staff Officer – Statistician	1	1
Support Grade Band 1	1	1
Support Grade Band 2	14.5	12.5
Technical Grade 1	9	9

Grade Description*	Number ff Vacant Posts Departments are Planning to Fill	Number of Vacant Posts Departments are Planning to Fill this Financial Year
Technical Grade 2	4	4
Trainee Trading Standards Officer	6	6
Typist	1	1
Veterinary Officer	8	8
Total	**795.04**	**740.38**

*FTE: Each full-time post is counted as one post and each part-time post is counted as a proportion (based on hours required) of a full-time post.

Grants for Vacant Properties

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if there are any grants available to assist rate payers who own vacant properties and wish to make improvements to bring them up to living standard.
(AQW 5682/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There are no grants available within the rating system to assist ratepayers who own vacant properties and wish to make improvements to bring them up to living standards.

In terms of any other system of grants this would be a matter for consideration by the Department for Social Development.

Civil Service: Equal Pay Settlement

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many civil servants have received payments under the Equal Pay Settlement; and what is the total cost of the payments to date.
(AQW 5961/11-15)

Mr Wilson: 15,120 civil servants have received payments under the Equal Pay Settlement at a total cost of £127.8 million to date.

In addition assimilation costs to the new higher pay scales added approximately £26m to the annual NICS pay bill.

Civil Service: Equal Pay Settlement

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether staff employed on a temporary contract within the Civil Service are eligible for a payment under the Equal Pay Settlement.
(AQW 5962/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Only staff directly employed on a temporary contract by an NICS Department on 1/2/09 are eligible for a payment under the Equal Pay Settlement.

Civil Service: Equal Pay Settlement

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 3569/10, in relation to the number of staff, in those civil service grades covered by the November equal pay claim offer, who left the service between 1 February 2003 and 31 July 2008, how many were employed on a (i) permanent contract; and (ii) temporary contract.
(AQW 5963/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The number of staff at Administrative Assistant, Administrative Officer and Executive Officer 2 (and analogous) who left the NICS between 1 February 2003 and 31 July 2008, are set out in the table below. These staff are not covered by the proposal to settle the NICS Equal Pay claims.

Grade	Permanent	Temporary
Administrative Assistant	1258	4168
Administrative Officer	2532	118
Executive Officer 2	652	32
Total	**4442**	**4318**

Census of Employment

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 3515/11-15, when the results of the 2011 Census of Employment will be made available.
(AQW 5969/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The 2011 Northern Ireland Census of Employment results will be made available on the same date as the 2011 UK Business Register and Employment Survey published by the Office for National Statistics. The provisional pre-announced publication date for this release is September 2012.

Housing Estates: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to provide a deprivation list ranking the housing estates in the North Down area.
(AQW 5970/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2010 is based on the Super Output Area geography. The table overleaf lists the Northern Ireland Housing Executive estates within North Down Local Government District, the Super Output Area(s) each estate is completely or partially within, and the corresponding Super Output Area rank of deprivation. Deprivation is ranked from rank 1 - the most deprived Super Output Area in Northern Ireland, to rank 890 - the least deprived Super Output Area in Northern Ireland.

A map showing the relationship between the NIHE estates and Super Output Areas is available at http://www.ninis.nisra.gov.uk/NorthDown_NIHE_SOAs.jpg

NIHE Estate	Super Output Area	Deprivation Rank (where rank 1 = most deprived)
Bloomfield/Rathgill/Willowbrook	Bangor Castle	545
	Bloomfield 1 North Down	382
	Bloomfield 2 North Down	568
	Conlig 2	670
	Conlig 3	168
Churchill	Ballycrochan 1	851
	Ballyholme	863
	Ballymaconnell 1	774
	Ballymaconnell 2	857
	Ballymagee 2	654
	Churchill 2	784
Clandeboye Road	Harbour 1	250
	Harbour 2	677
	Silverstream	525
Clanmorris	Whitehill	240
Conlig/Breezemount	Conlig 1	521
	Conlig 2	670
Crawfordsburn	Crawfordsburn	856
Groomsport	Ballymaconnell 2	857
	Groomsport	721
Helens Bay	Craigavad	842
	Cultra	867
	Holywood Priory	848

NIHE Estate	Super Output Area	Deprivation Rank (where rank 1 = most deprived)
Kilcooley	Clandeboye 1	415
	Clandeboye 2	819
	Clandeboye 3	403
	Dufferin	211
	Silverstream	525
Lisnabreen	Bangor Castle	545
Loughview	Holywood Demesne	696
	Loughview 1	307
	Loughview 2	709
Redburn	Loughview 1	307
Spencer Street	Holywood Demesne	696
	Holywood Priory	848
Strand/Kinnegar	Holywood Demesne	696
	Holywood Priory	848
Whitehill	Bryansburn 1	836
	Whitehill	240
Woodlands	Cultra	867
	Holywood Priory	848

Civil Service: Equal Pay Settlement

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number of people paid, to date, as part of the Equal Pay Settlement; and (ii) the total amount, spent to date as a percentage of the money allocated from the Treasury for the Settlement.
(AQW 5985/11-15)

Mr Wilson: 15,120 civil servants have received payments under the Equal Pay Settlement at a total cost of £127.8 million to date.

In addition assimilation costs to the new higher pay scales added approximately £26m to the annual NICS pay bill.

No additional resources were secured from the UK Treasury to address the equal pay issue. However, the Treasury did provide flexibility in terms of re-profiled capital and borrowing powers that could then, on an exceptional basis, be converted to current expenditure.

Civil Service: Equal Pay Settlement

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) to detail the number of staff who have (a) left; and (b) retired from the Civil Service who have been excluded from the Equal Pay Settlement; and (ii) to provide a breakdown of the total number of individuals included in the Settlement who were on (a) temporary and (b) permanent contracts.
(AQW 5986/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The number of staff at Administrative Assistant, Administrative Officer and Executive Officer 2 (and analogous) who left the NICS between 1 February 2003 and 31 July 2008, are set out in the table below. These staff are not covered by the proposal to settle the NICS Equal Pay claims.

Grade	Left	Retired
AA/AO/EO2	7855	905

The total number of individuals included in the Equal Pay Settlement is 15,923, of which 15,461 were on permanent contracts and 462 on temporary contracts as at 1 February 2009.

Rates: Annual Payments by Businesses

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether businesses have to pay their annual rates in one instalment; and if so, why they cannot pay in monthly instalments.
(AQW 6001/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Businesses do not have to pay their annual rates in one instalment, unless they choose to do so.

LPS offers a wide range of payment options allowing the ratepayer to choose the one that best suits them. The following monthly payment options are available;

- direct debit;
- online using our website;
- personal banking options ie standing order; telephone banking; and

internet banking

- pay at a Post Office or Payzone outlet; and
- pay by cheque.

Civil Service: Economists

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) for his assessment of whether it is necessary to have 84 economists employed within the Civil Service; and (ii) to detail the function of each post..
(AQW 6037/11-15)

Mr Wilson: At 1 April 2011, the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) employed around 25,000 people, supporting Ministers, developing policy and legislation, and delivering or supporting key public services in a wide range of complex areas such as health, education, economic development, employment, agriculture, regeneration, culture, justice and transport. The NICS employs both administrators and a wide variety of professional staff required. It is necessary to employ economists as part of the mix of skills.

The role of economists within the NICS is to provide timely and relevant economic advice in support of policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. NICS economists also provide advice on investment appraisals and value-for-money decisions in the allocation of public expenditure in Northern Ireland.

It is for individual departments to determine the nature and level of professional advice that is required. DFP then recruits and manages the career development of economists in a similar way to many other professional staff groups. The range of duties carried out by NICS economists is diverse and varies by individual business area. Detailing the specific functions of each of the 84 posts would entail disproportionate effort, time and cost.

Civil Servants: Economists

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 5083/2011-15, how many economists were employed in the Civil Service prior to the closure of the Economic Research Institute for Northern Ireland.
(AQW 6039/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The table overleaf sets out the position in accordance with the most recently published data at 1 April 2011.

Total Number Of NICS Staff Employed As Economists At 1 April 2011

Grade	Agricultural Economists	Economists	Total
Staff Headcount	12	68	80

Notes:

1. Data sourced from HRConnect at 1st April 2011.
2. Staff on career break have been excluded.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of people who have come off Job Seeker's Allowance (i) to emigrate; (ii) to start their own business; (iii) to enter employment; or (iv) as their qualifying period expired, in each of the last seven years, broken down by council area.
(AQW 6045/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Claimants who come off unemployment related benefits each month are required to inform their Job Benefit Office about their future plans. This information is provided in the attached tables for each District Council Area in Northern Ireland. While this will not provide an answer for all the categories listed in the question, it is the most comprehensive breakdown available of reasons for leaving Job Seekers Allowance.

Table 1 – Off flows of unemployment benefit claimants by reason for leaving in Antrim DCA for each calendar Year 2005 – 2011*

Reason for Leaving	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Found Work	695	775	710	680	1,040	1,140	1,030
Education/Training	60	95	95	50	120	105	215
Other Benefit	135	120	110	95	85	60	85
Death/Ageing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claimant Withdrawn	20	30	40	30	20	30	15
Gone abroad	60	60	60	90	145	110	115
Not Known	55	120	140	90	235	250	260
Failed to sign	405	425	400	380	590	585	700
Court/Prison	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Total	**1,480**	**1,630**	**1,540**	**1,460**	**2,265**	**2,335**	**2,480**

Notes:

1 Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only.

2 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and totals may not sum due to rounding at lower levels of detail

* 2011 data is up to and including November 2011

3 Please note that claimants who come off unemployment related benefits in one month may return to this benefit in future months and will therefore be counted as an 'off-flow' on multiple occasions.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Table 2 – Off flows of unemployment benefit claimants by reason for leaving in Ards DCA for each calendar Year 2005 – 2011*

Reason for Leaving	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Found Work	1,135	1,065	965	950	1,235	1,180	1,160
Education/Training	120	125	120	120	205	260	450
Other Benefit	215	190	240	170	90	100	80
Death/Ageing	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claimant Withdrawn	10	10	15	10	60	80	30
Gone abroad	150	130	125	125	165	215	180
Not Known	210	235	230	200	345	365	385
Failed to sign	545	575	565	560	915	880	770
Court/Prison	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**2,455**	**2,370**	**2,300**	**2,170**	**3,050**	**3,100**	**3,090**

Notes:

1 Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only.

2 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and totals may not sum due to rounding at lower levels of detail

* 2011 data is up to and including November 2011

3 Please note that claimants who come off unemployment related benefits in one month may return to this benefit in future months and will therefore be counted as an 'off-flow' on multiple occasions.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Table 3 – Off flows of unemployment benefit claimants by reason for leaving in Armagh DCA for each calendar Year 2005 – 2011*

Reason for Leaving	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Found Work	675	735	715	720	1,015	1,175	1,010
Education/Training	145	125	85	120	130	195	290
Other Benefit	160	155	120	135	75	85	120
Death/Ageing	0	0	5	0	0	0	0
Claimant Withdrawn	0	0	10	0	5	0	5
Gone abroad	50	50	45	65	80	75	85
Not Known	140	115	115	190	390	420	425
Failed to sign	595	485	460	565	820	895	910
Court/Prison	0	0	0	0	5	0	5
Total	**1,805**	**1,690**	**1,595**	**1,835**	**2,565**	**2,865**	**2,875**

Notes:

1 Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only.

2 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and totals may not sum due to rounding at lower levels of detail

* 2011 data is up to and including November 2011

3 Please note that claimants who come off unemployment related benefits in one month may return to this benefit in future months and will therefore be counted as an 'off-flow' on multiple occasions.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Table 4 – Off flows of unemployment benefit claimants by reason for leaving in Ballymena DCA for each calendar Year 2005 – 2011*

Reason for Leaving	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Found Work	745	800	715	725	985	1,155	1,165
Education/Training	135	170	160	140	150	235	275
Other Benefit	140	155	150	120	60	75	80
Death/Ageing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claimant Withdrawn	15	30	45	15	40	35	40
Gone abroad	55	70	55	70	120	80	125
Not Known	120	110	90	130	310	350	320
Failed to sign	545	555	600	610	860	810	820
Court/Prison	10	0	0	0	0	5	0
Total	**1,850**	**1,960**	**1,865**	**1,840**	**2,550**	**2,790**	**2,865**

Notes:

1 Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only.

2 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and totals may not sum due to rounding at lower levels of detail

* 2011 data is up to and including November 2011

3 Please note that claimants who come off unemployment related benefits in one month may return to this benefit in future months and will therefore be counted as an 'off-flow' on multiple occasions.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Table 5 – Off flows of unemployment benefit claimants by reason for leaving in Ballymoney DCA for each calendar Year 2005 – 2011*

Reason for Leaving	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Found Work	415	405	385	450	655	675	745
Education/Training	60	125	90	75	85	175	195
Other Benefit	85	85	55	70	40	40	10
Death/Ageing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claimant Withdrawn	10	10	15	30	85	25	10
Gone abroad	40	35	25	55	90	55	70
Not Known	70	85	35	55	135	185	210
Failed to sign	320	365	335	345	455	410	385
Court/Prison	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**1,020**	**1,135**	**960**	**1,135**	**1,570**	**1,590**	**1,685**

Notes:

1 Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only.

2 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and totals may not sum due to rounding at lower levels of detail

* 2011 data is up to and including November 2011

3 Please note that claimants who come off unemployment related benefits in one month may return to this benefit in future months and will therefore be counted as an 'off-flow' on multiple occasions.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Table 6 – Off flows of unemployment benefit claimants by reason for leaving in Banbridge DCA for each calendar Year 2005 – 2011*

Reason for Leaving	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Found Work	540	570	515	605	860	825	860
Education/Training	80	70	55	50	75	115	160
Other Benefit	115	70	70	85	35	55	45
Death/Ageing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claimant Withdrawn	5	25	10	20	20	15	20
Gone abroad	45	60	75	75	105	85	125
Not Known	50	65	55	65	185	195	245
Failed to sign	375	365	315	385	560	640	505
Court/Prison	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**1,250**	**1,260**	**1,145**	**1,315**	**1,905**	**1,980**	**2,010**

Notes:

1 Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only.

2 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and totals may not sum due to rounding at lower levels of detail

* 2011 data is up to and including November 2011

3 Please note that claimants who come off unemployment related benefits in one month may return to this benefit in future months and will therefore be counted as an 'off-flow' on multiple occasions.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Table 7 – Off flows of unemployment benefit claimants by reason for leaving in Belfast DCA for each calendar Year 2005 – 2011*

Reason for Leaving	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Found Work	4,560	4,375	4,010	3,825	4,810	5,530	5,520
Education/Training	1,650	1,590	1,350	1,300	1,905	2,525	2,790
Other Benefit	1,670	1,580	1,480	1,325	785	845	895
Death/Ageing	10	10	15	10	15	5	10
Claimant Withdrawn	210	235	310	280	375	415	345
Gone abroad	555	545	455	450	650	620	870
Not Known	965	1,065	965	1,045	2,235	2,450	2,600
Failed to sign	5,715	5,850	5,860	5,375	7,190	7,530	6,410
Court/Prison	35	45	50	50	65	80	175
Total	**15,360**	**15,320**	**14,540**	**13,695**	**18,035**	**20,005**	**19,640**

Notes:

1 Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only.

2 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and totals may not sum due to rounding at lower levels of detail

* 2011 data is up to and including November 2011

3 Please note that claimants who come off unemployment related benefits in one month may return to this benefit in future months and will therefore be counted as an 'off-flow' on multiple occasions.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Table 8 – Off flows of unemployment benefit claimants by reason for leaving in Carrickfergus DCA for each calendar Year 2005 – 2011*

Reason for Leaving	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Found Work	730	700	620	555	820	880	730
Education/Training	150	135	85	65	110	200	195
Other Benefit	105	130	90	105	60	75	60
Death/Ageing	0	5	0	0	0	0	0
Claimant Withdrawn	50	45	55	35	50	40	25
Gone abroad	95	90	70	80	135	140	150
Not Known	105	80	105	90	200	210	240
Failed to sign	490	470	505	405	655	760	575
Court/Prison	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**1,750**	**1,685**	**1,570**	**1,370**	**2,060**	**2,325**	**2,015**

Notes:

1 Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only.

2 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and totals may not sum due to rounding at lower levels of detail

* 2011 data is up to and including November 2011

3 Please note that claimants who come off unemployment related benefits in one month may return to this benefit in future months and will therefore be counted as an 'off-flow' on multiple occasions.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Table 9 – Off flows of unemployment benefit claimants by reason for leaving in Castlereagh DCA for each calendar Year 2005 – 2011*

Reason for Leaving	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Found Work	770	750	590	610	940	1,025	1,020
Education/Training	95	90	60	75	100	185	270
Other Benefit	100	105	85	90	50	65	60
Death/Ageing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claimant Withdrawn	5	0	0	0	5	10	10
Gone abroad	105	95	70	100	155	155	195
Not Known	150	125	80	100	210	255	255
Failed to sign	690	655	540	495	835	925	790
Court/Prison	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**1,935**	**1,830**	**1,465**	**1,495**	**2,340**	**2,645**	**2,625**

Notes:

1 Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only.

2 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and totals may not sum due to rounding at lower levels of detail

* 2011 data is up to and including November 2011

3 Please note that claimants who come off unemployment related benefits in one month may return to this benefit in future months and will therefore be counted as an 'off-flow' on multiple occasions.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Table 10 – Off flows of unemployment benefit claimants by reason for leaving in Coleraine DCA for each calendar Year 2005 – 2011*

Reason for Leaving	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Found Work	970	1,040	925	930	1,235	1,235	1,130
Education/Training	205	210	195	150	265	400	555
Other Benefit	245	225	190	165	100	145	115
Death/Ageing	10	10	0	0	0	0	0
Claimant Withdrawn	20	35	50	40	65	30	5
Gone abroad	75	95	120	105	130	115	130
Not Known	440	320	300	315	505	425	455
Failed to sign	520	640	640	670	945	750	690
Court/Prison	5	0	0	0	15	15	10
Total	**2,535**	**2,615**	**2,440**	**2,440**	**3,255**	**3,145**	**3,145**

Notes:

1 Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only.

2 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and totals may not sum due to rounding at lower levels of detail

* 2011 data is up to and including November 2011

3 Please note that claimants who come off unemployment related benefits in one month may return to this benefit in future months and will therefore be counted as an 'off-flow' on multiple occasions.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Table 11 – Off flows of unemployment benefit claimants by reason for leaving in Cookstown DCA for each calendar Year 2005 – 2011*

Reason for Leaving	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Found Work	390	465	410	455	730	685	695
Education/Training	55	50	60	50	120	215	240
Other Benefit	80	95	115	70	50	50	55
Death/Ageing	0	0	0	0	0	5	0
Claimant Withdrawn	15	10	10	10	20	15	0
Gone abroad	25	40	15	45	45	75	85
Not Known	40	65	65	80	215	240	235
Failed to sign	275	295	270	325	440	665	660
Court/Prison	0	0	0	0	0	5	0
Total	**905**	**1,040**	**975**	**1,070**	**1,660**	**2,025**	**2,020**

Notes:

1 Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only.

2 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and totals may not sum due to rounding at lower levels of detail

* 2011 data is up to and including November 2011

3 Please note that claimants who come off unemployment related benefits in one month may return to this benefit in future months and will therefore be counted as an 'off-flow' on multiple occasions.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Table 12 – Off flows of unemployment benefit claimants by reason for leaving in Craigavon DCA for each calendar Year 2005 – 2011*

Reason for Leaving	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Found Work	1,460	1,620	1,440	1,520	1,965	2,080	2,025
Education/Training	260	245	225	215	250	295	505
Other Benefit	280	275	300	275	200	170	180
Death/Ageing	0	0	0	0	5	5	0
Claimant Withdrawn	25	10	30	35	45	45	30
Gone abroad	135	165	135	130	230	180	210
Not Known	155	130	135	240	525	565	605
Failed to sign	845	955	1,025	1,020	1,390	1,325	1,220
Court/Prison	0	5	10	0	15	30	55
Total	**3,215**	**3,435**	**3,350**	**3,475**	**4,670**	**4,730**	**4,860**

Notes:

1 Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only.

2 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and totals may not sum due to rounding at lower levels of detail

* 2011 data is up to and including November 2011

3 Please note that claimants who come off unemployment related benefits in one month may return to this benefit in future months and will therefore be counted as an 'off-flow' on multiple occasions.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Table 13 – Off flows of unemployment benefit claimants by reason for leaving in Derry DCA for each calendar Year 2005 – 2011*

Reason for Leaving	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Found Work	1,980	1,960	1,770	1,785	2,190	2,260	2,175
Education/Training	1,400	1,165	1,130	1,160	1,255	1,610	1,255
Other Benefit	545	540	560	475	295	335	300
Death/Ageing	0	5	0	5	0	0	0
Claimant Withdrawn	215	210	100	100	140	130	65
Gone abroad	170	165	150	165	170	135	180
Not Known	415	515	465	430	710	885	1,025
Failed to sign	2,220	2,385	1,975	1,990	2,325	2,470	2,225
Court/Prison	0	0	0	0	10	20	5
Total	**6,965**	**6,990**	**6,155**	**6,150**	**7,130**	**7,860**	**7,275**

Notes:

1 Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only.

2 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and totals may not sum due to rounding at lower levels of detail

* 2011 data is up to and including November 2011

3 Please note that claimants who come off unemployment related benefits in one month may return to this benefit in future months and will therefore be counted as an 'off-flow' on multiple occasions.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Table 14 – Off flows of unemployment benefit claimants by reason for leaving in Down DCA for each calendar Year 2005 – 2011*

Reason for Leaving	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Found Work	985	985	810	885	1,150	1,270	1,230
Education/Training	185	210	175	155	205	415	555
Other Benefit	235	220	180	215	130	135	130
Death/Ageing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claimant Withdrawn	30	45	25	10	15	30	35
Gone abroad	95	100	90	100	145	205	160
Not Known	200	165	190	220	390	455	470
Failed to sign	700	715	700	790	1,205	1,140	1,075
Court/Prison	0	0	5	0	10	0	0
Total	**2,465**	**2,470**	**2,240**	**2,430**	**3,290**	**3,675**	**3,670**

Notes:

1 Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only.

2 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and totals may not sum due to rounding at lower levels of detail

* 2011 data is up to and including November 2011

3 Please note that claimants who come off unemployment related benefits in one month may return to this benefit in future months and will therefore be counted as an 'off-flow' on multiple occasions.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Table 15 – Off flows of unemployment benefit claimants by reason for leaving in Dungannon DCA for each calendar Year 2005 – 2011*

Reason for Leaving	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Found Work	635	675	600	670	1,190	1,350	1,240
Education/Training	115	100	80	70	165	200	290
Other Benefit	130	135	110	105	60	95	100
Death/Ageing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claimant Withdrawn	0	0	0	0	15	20	15
Gone abroad	50	50	50	85	120	140	155
Not Known	100	120	105	110	290	415	350
Failed to sign	530	500	510	560	910	1,010	1,040
Court/Prison	0	0	0	0	5	0	0
Total	**1,585**	**1,610**	**1,465**	**1,655**	**2,770**	**3,275**	**3,250**

Notes:

1 Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only.

2 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and totals may not sum due to rounding at lower levels of detail

* 2011 data is up to and including November 2011

3 Please note that claimants who come off unemployment related benefits in one month may return to this benefit in future months and will therefore be counted as an 'off-flow' on multiple occasions.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Table 16 – Off flows of unemployment benefit claimants by reason for leaving in Fermanagh DCA for each calendar Year 2005 – 2011*

Reason for Leaving	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Found Work	915	855	790	775	1,110	1,125	990
Education/Training	275	195	175	220	305	490	480
Other Benefit	240	190	175	180	80	90	70
Death/Ageing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claimant Withdrawn	20	5	15	20	5	15	15
Gone abroad	100	95	80	90	120	135	165
Not Known	140	145	170	120	255	375	300
Failed to sign	610	645	625	590	755	855	775
Court/Prison	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**2,360**	**2,170**	**2,050**	**2,015**	**2,665**	**3,090**	**2,835**

Notes:

1 Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only.

2 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and totals may not sum due to rounding at lower levels of detail

* 2011 data is up to and including November 2011

3 Please note that claimants who come off unemployment related benefits in one month may return to this benefit in future months and will therefore be counted as an 'off-flow' on multiple occasions.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Table 17 – Off flows of unemployment benefit claimants by reason for leaving in Larne DCA for each calendar Year 2005 – 2011*

Reason for Leaving	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Found Work	655	585	520	540	700	805	645
Education/Training	90	80	95	95	140	210	225
Other Benefit	150	110	90	85	45	35	50
Death/Ageing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claimant Withdrawn	35	30	25	10	50	45	45
Gone abroad	30	35	35	40	70	70	75
Not Known	45	45	45	70	175	225	205
Failed to sign	310	280	280	270	485	470	395
Court/Prison	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**1,325**	**1,185**	**1,125**	**1,155**	**1,700**	**1,915**	**1,665**

Notes:

1 Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only.

2 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and totals may not sum due to rounding at lower levels of detail

* 2011 data is up to and including November 2011

3 Please note that claimants who come off unemployment related benefits in one month may return to this benefit in future months and will therefore be counted as an 'off-flow' on multiple occasions.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Table 18 – Off flows of unemployment benefit claimants by reason for leaving in Limavady DCA for each calendar Year 2005 – 2011*

Reason for Leaving	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Found Work	680	660	540	680	995	910	880
Education/Training	220	180	165	185	290	325	415
Other Benefit	170	165	115	145	95	95	75
Death/Ageing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claimant Withdrawn	40	0	0	15	10	15	10
Gone abroad	55	55	30	60	105	70	75
Not Known	50	105	125	115	275	285	320
Failed to sign	300	325	290	375	575	555	550
Court/Prison	0	0	0	5	5	0	10
Total	**1,535**	**1,525**	**1,305**	**1,580**	**2,385**	**2,285**	**2,355**

Notes:

1 Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only.

2 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and totals may not sum due to rounding at lower levels of detail

* 2011 data is up to and including November 2011

3 Please note that claimants who come off unemployment related benefits in one month may return to this benefit in future months and will therefore be counted as an 'off-flow' on multiple occasions.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Table 19 – Off flows of unemployment benefit claimants by reason for leaving in Lisburn DCA for each calendar Year 2005 – 2011*

Reason for Leaving	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Found Work	1,480	1,475	1,370	1,370	1,985	2,120	2,025
Education/Training	235	310	270	275	430	550	700
Other Benefit	280	315	285	260	215	225	205
Death/Ageing	0	5	0	0	5	5	0
Claimant Withdrawn	25	20	35	20	65	80	65
Gone abroad	165	155	145	180	255	240	280
Not Known	180	225	235	245	525	540	645
Failed to sign	1,180	1,380	1,350	1,140	1,830	2,010	1,685
Court/Prison	0	0	0	5	0	15	30
Total	**3,620**	**3,925**	**3,720**	**3,530**	**5,350**	**5,810**	**5,685**

Notes:

1 Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only.

2 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and totals may not sum due to rounding at lower levels of detail

* 2011 data is up to and including November 2011

3 Please note that claimants who come off unemployment related benefits in one month may return to this benefit in future months and will therefore be counted as an 'off-flow' on multiple occasions.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Table 20 – Off flows of unemployment benefit claimants by reason for leaving in Magherafelt DCA for each calendar Year 2005 – 2011*

Reason for Leaving	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Found Work	530	585	455	575	930	1,070	1,025
Education/Training	85	85	80	90	120	205	275
Other Benefit	90	100	90	100	40	60	50
Death/Ageing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claimant Withdrawn	0	10	10	0	0	0	15
Gone abroad	45	55	35	95	140	100	95
Not Known	60	55	45	65	180	265	285
Failed to sign	245	290	270	360	530	510	540
Court/Prison	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**1,085**	**1,185**	**1,025**	**1,290**	**2,005**	**2,265**	**2,325**

Notes:

1 Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only.

2 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and totals may not sum due to rounding at lower levels of detail

* 2011 data is up to and including November 2011

3 Please note that claimants who come off unemployment related benefits in one month may return to this benefit in future months and will therefore be counted as an 'off-flow' on multiple occasions.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Table 21 – Off flows of unemployment benefit claimants by reason for leaving in Moyle DCA for each calendar Year 2005 – 2011*

Reason for Leaving	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Found Work	245	225	205	240	295	380	340
Education/Training	60	70	55	60	90	105	130
Other Benefit	70	60	60	45	20	15	15
Death/Ageing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claimant Withdrawn	0	0	10	10	35	10	0
Gone abroad	5	20	30	15	15	25	30
Not Known	80	60	40	40	125	145	135
Failed to sign	215	310	230	255	300	340	355
Court/Prison	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**690**	**780**	**650**	**715**	**900**	**1,070**	**1,065**

Notes:

1 Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only.

2 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and totals may not sum due to rounding at lower levels of detail

* 2011 data is up to and including November 2011

3 Please note that claimants who come off unemployment related benefits in one month may return to this benefit in future months and will therefore be counted as an 'off-flow' on multiple occasions.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Table 22 – Off flows of unemployment benefit claimants by reason for leaving in Newry & Mourne DCA for each calendar Year 2005 – 2011*

Reason for Leaving	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Found Work	1,295	1,285	1,165	1,300	1,845	2,010	2,090
Education/Training	280	195	245	190	290	340	405
Other Benefit	290	295	285	225	180	180	190
Death/Ageing	0	0	0	0	5	0	0
Claimant Withdrawn	5	70	55	20	15	50	95
Gone abroad	100	100	95	120	160	170	225
Not Known	175	160	170	170	510	575	660
Failed to sign	1,055	1,030	980	1,050	1,430	1,440	1,635
Court/Prison	0	0	0	0	5	0	0
Total	**3,225**	**3,155**	**3,040**	**3,105**	**4,485**	**4,790**	**5,315**

Notes:

1 Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only.

2 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and totals may not sum due to rounding at lower levels of detail

* 2011 data is up to and including November 2011

3 Please note that claimants who come off unemployment related benefits in one month may return to this benefit in future months and will therefore be counted as an 'off-flow' on multiple occasions.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Table 23 – Off flows of unemployment benefit claimants by reason for leaving in Newtownabbey DCA for each calendar Year 2005 – 2011*

Reason for Leaving	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Found Work	1,185	1,180	1,020	990	1,360	1,415	1,370
Education/Training	165	150	185	150	255	335	495
Other Benefit	215	190	180	185	125	125	160
Death/Ageing	0	0	0	0	0	10	0
Claimant Withdrawn	30	35	25	35	40	40	25
Gone abroad	140	145	125	120	225	170	265
Not Known	145	185	130	100	290	340	415
Failed to sign	920	1,065	955	825	1,260	1,490	1,240
Court/Prison	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Total	**2,825**	**2,950**	**2,655**	**2,445**	**3,570**	**3,955**	**4,020**

Notes:

1 Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only.

2 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and totals may not sum due to rounding at lower levels of detail

* 2011 data is up to and including November 2011

3 Please note that claimants who come off unemployment related benefits in one month may return to this benefit in future months and will therefore be counted as an 'off-flow' on multiple occasions.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Table 24 – Off flows of unemployment benefit claimants by reason for leaving in North Down DCA for each calendar Year 2005 – 2011*

Reason for Leaving	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Found Work	1,060	970	930	885	1,110	1,215	1,260
Education/Training	135	105	95	105	160	260	350
Other Benefit	160	135	140	100	60	60	80
Death/Ageing	0	0	5	0	0	0	0
Claimant Withdrawn	70	70	60	40	60	60	40
Gone abroad	175	150	160	135	215	255	235
Not Known	245	250	285	250	335	380	390
Failed to sign	740	610	605	570	900	950	875
Court/Prison	0	0	0	0	0	5	0
Total	**2,620**	**2,330**	**2,345**	**2,125**	**2,880**	**3,225**	**3,255**

Notes:

1 Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only.

2 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and totals may not sum due to rounding at lower levels of detail

* 2011 data is up to and including November 2011

3 Please note that claimants who come off unemployment related benefits in one month may return to this benefit in future months and will therefore be counted as an 'off-flow' on multiple occasions.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Table 25 – Off flows of unemployment benefit claimants by reason for leaving in Omagh DCA for each calendar Year 2005 – 2011*

Reason for Leaving	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Found Work	775	680	635	705	975	1,025	870
Education/Training	185	190	155	115	165	170	250
Other Benefit	180	195	155	120	55	95	90
Death/Ageing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Claimant Withdrawn	20	10	5	20	25	30	10
Gone abroad	60	90	65	80	80	100	120
Not Known	210	190	155	140	315	320	340
Failed to sign	525	590	500	535	695	910	835
Court/Prison	0	0	5	0	0	10	30
Total	**1,990**	**1,930**	**1,680**	**1,725**	**2,365**	**2,685**	**2,575**

Notes:

1 Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only.

2 Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and totals may not sum due to rounding at lower levels of detail

* 2011 data is up to and including November 2011

3 Please note that claimants who come off unemployment related benefits in one month may return to this benefit in future months and will therefore be counted as an 'off-flow' on multiple occasions.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Table 26 – Off flows of unemployment benefit claimants by reason for leaving in Strabane DCA for each calendar Year 2005 – 2011*

Reason for Leaving	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011*
Found Work	670	650	655	560	665	680	635
Education/Training	430	410	355	280	485	645	735
Other Benefit	175	190	160	140	95	95	70
Death/Ageing	0	0	0	0	5	0	0
Claimant Withdrawn	0	0	0	0	5	0	0
Gone abroad	65	60	55	35	85	75	55
Not Known	205	260	375	360	470	505	375
Failed to sign	430	500	380	385	475	455	420
Court/Prison	0	0	0	0	5	5	5
Total	**2,015**	**2,105**	**2,010**	**1,815**	**2,265**	**2,475**	**2,330**

Notes:

1 Figures are not seasonally adjusted and relate to computerised claims only.

2. Figures are rounded to the nearest 5 and totals may not sum due to rounding at lower levels of detail

* 2011 data is up to and including November 2011

3 Please note that claimants who come off unemployment related benefits in one month may return to this benefit in future months and will therefore be counted as an 'off-flow' on multiple occasions.

Source: Northern Ireland Claimant Count

Vacant Residential Properties

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of vacant residential properties in each constituency.
(AQW 6062/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Information on the number of vacant residential properties in each Northern Ireland constituency is not available as data is collated at District Council and Ward level only.

The table overleaf lists the number of vacant domestic properties in each District Council area as at 18th December 2011.

Number of Vacant Domestic Properties as at 18 December 2011

District Council Area	Number of Properties
Antrim	749
Ards	1,674
Armagh	1,599
Ballymena	1,007
Ballymoney	581
Banbridge	1,118
Belfast	7,547
Carrickfergus	631
Castlereagh	925
Coleraine	1,981
Cookstown	1,005
Craigavon	2,030
Derry	1,538
Down	1,767
Dungannon and South Tyrone	2,029
Fermanagh	2,646
Larne	701
Limavady	820
Lisburn	1,999
Magherafelt	869
Moyle	609
Newry and Mourne	2,675
Newtownabbey	892
North Down	1,290
Omagh	1,961
Strabane	885
Northern Ireland Total	**41,528**

Civil Service: Equal Pay Settlement

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline any meetings he has had with representatives of the Civil Service Pension Scheme about the impact of the Equal Pay Settlement on the pensions of retired Civil Servants.
(AQW 6067/11-15)

Mr Wilson: In my response I have assumed that the member is referring to meetings with the Civil Service Pensioners Alliance (CSPA).

I have not met with any representatives of the Civil Service Pensioners Alliance in relation to the equal pay settlement.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Kinship Care

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) what research has been carried out on the benefits of kinship care for children who are unable to live with their birth parents; (ii) whether any further research has been proposed into the benefits of kinship care; and (iii) what services are in place, or are going to be put in place, to support the most vulnerable children living in kinship care.
(AQW 5832/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): My Department has not carried out any pure research on kinship care and there are no current plans to conduct research in this particular area of child care. However, work on the development of kinship foster care standards and guidance has been undertaken in consultation with individuals and groups with an interest in and knowledge of kinship care and was informed by research undertaken prior to the standards development exercise. Also, if possible, it is intended to use the 2011 Census returns to establish a baseline for the extent to which kinship care is taking place in Northern Ireland, including that undertaken in the context of an informal family arrangement.

The services and supports available to vulnerable children living in kinship care, under arrangements approved by social services, are the same as those available to any child identified as in need of either safeguarding or family support. The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 establishes the principle of paramountcy of the child's best-interests. In accordance with the law, the primary focus of Health and Social Care Trusts is on the provision of services to meet the identified needs of the child and to satisfy his or her best-interests.

Health Screening: Prisons

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether newly sentenced, or remanded, prisoners are screened for contagious health conditions; and whether there are measures in place to address these conditions to prevent any potential spread throughout the prison population.
(AQW 5843/11-15)

Mr Poots: As part of the committal process all prisoners are seen by a nurse and a complete health assessment is carried out. Any clinical needs identified during this assessment are treated accordingly. This would include infection prevention and control.

Accident and Emergency Department: Belfast City Hospital

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the impact of the closure of the Accident and Emergency Department at Belfast City Hospital on the Accident and Emergency Department at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast.
(AQW 5861/11-15)

Mr Poots: Following the temporary closure of the Accident and Emergency department at the Belfast City Hospital, the Belfast Trust has carefully coordinated its services across all its hospital sites to maximise use of resources. It links with other HSC organisations and community care on a daily basis to maximise services for patients.

The impact of changes includes increased capacity in the emergency departments(ED) at the Royal and Mater Hospitals, and new inpatient arrangements linking in with Belfast City Hospital. There has been a reorganisation of ED clinical rotas and enhanced supervision of junior doctors. There has also been reconfigured and enhanced diagnostic services and theatre capacity.

Provisional statistics indicate that in November there were 7,459 attendances in the ED at the Royal, an increase of over 28% compared to November 2010. While there has been some decline in performance in the numbers of patients waiting over 4 hours, this should be seen in the context of the additional attendances. There has been a considerable reduction in the number of patients waiting longer than 12 hours when compared to the same month (November) in 2010.

It should be noted that changes in ED attendances and waiting times can change on a daily basis, especially in wintertime. Performance is being carefully monitored by the HSC Board.

Ambulance Directors

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the current number of ambulance directors.
(AQW 5864/11-15)

Mr Poots: This information is available in the published NIAS Annual Report 2010-11 and on the NIAS website at www.niamb.co.uk/docs/key_people.html.

Mental Health: People Claiming Out-of-work Benefits

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of why there is a disproportionate number of people claiming, illness related, out-of-work benefits, due to mental health and behavioural problems.
(AQW 5882/11-15)

Mr Poots: Research indicates that Northern Ireland has higher levels of mental illness than other parts of the UK. It is estimated that one in four people in Northern Ireland will suffer from a medically identified mental illness during their lifetime.

Entitlement to social security benefits is a matter for the Department for Social Development.

Travelling Community: Foster Care

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 4526/11-15, (i) whether placing children from the Travelling Community into foster care is problematic; and (ii) whether Health and Social Care Trusts have alternative arrangements in place.
(AQW 5903/11-15)

Mr Poots: As indicated in response to AQW 4526/11-15, Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts are encouraged to recruit foster carers from the communities from which children enter the care system and, where it is in keeping with the child's best interests, to endeavour to place them within their family or wider family circle. All five HSC Trusts have indicated they have no difficulties placing children from the travelling community in foster care and, as a consequence, have no need to put alternative arrangements in place.

Anti-TNF Drugs

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many people are currently being treated with anti-TNF drugs, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area; and (ii) the annual cost of providing anti-TNF drugs in each of the last three years.
(AQW 5905/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department collects monthly information on the number of patients receiving biologic treatment for severe inflammatory arthritis. "Biologics" include some specialist drugs which are not anti-TNFs. The number of patients in each HSC Trust that were being treated with biologic drugs for severe inflammatory arthritis at the 30th November 2011, including patients currently suspended from their treatment, are contained in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of patients being treated with biologic drugs for severe inflammatory arthritis, by HSC Trust: position at 30th November 2011

	Number of patients currently being treated with biologic drugs for severe inflammatory arthritis[1]		
HSC Trust	**Number on treatment**	**Number suspended from treatment**	**Total number on treatment or suspended from treatment**
Belfast	1,339	107	1,446
Northern	364	34	398
South Eastern	167	25	192
Southern	216	23	239
Western	188	10	198
Northern Ireland	**2,274**	**199**	**2,473**

Source: Departmental Return SDR 5

1 Patients who have commenced treatment may be temporarily suspended for medical or social reasons. While they are not actively receiving treatment during their period of suspension, they are still included in the treatment programme and can resume active treatment at any time.

The annual cost of providing biologic drugs for the treatment of severe inflammatory arthritis in each of the last three financial years is outlined in Table 2. This refers to the drug costs alone and does not include the infrastructure costs (e.g. staff, clinical capacity) required to deliver biologic drug treatment safely and effectively.

Table 2: Cost of providing biologic drugs for the treatment of severe inflammatory arthritis, by HSC Trust: 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11

	Financial Year		
HSC Trust	**2008/09**	**2009/10**	**2010/11**
Belfast	5,809,347	7,373,834	7,971,289
Northern	860,112	1,357,027	1,950,729

HSC Trust	Financial Year		
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
South-Eastern	428,096	710,526	1,007,726
Southern	439,635	986,270	1,393,534
Western	218,256	517,801	1,575,863
Northern Ireland	**7,755,446**	**10,945,458**	**13,899,141**

Source: HSC Trusts

Biologic drugs may also be used in the treatment of conditions such as severe psoriasis, Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis. My Department does not routinely collect information on the number of patients receiving biologic treatment for these conditions.

Accident and Emergency Department: Royal Victoria Hospital

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of patients at the Accident and Emergency Department at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast, who had to wait more than eight hours before being admitted to hospital in the last 12 months; and (ii) the reasons for the delay in admission.
(AQW 5909/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) Information on the length of time patients waited before being admitted to hospital is not collected by the Department.

However, information provided by the Belfast HSC Trust indicates that between 1st December 2010 and 30th November 2011, 1,641 out of a total of 13,996 patients waited more than 8 hours in the Royal Victoria emergency care department following a decision to admit and the time that the patient left the department.

(i) Information on the reasons for the delay in admission to hospital is not collected by the Department and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department is taking to increase GPs understanding of myalgic encephalomyelitis.
(AQW 5926/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department endorsed National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidance on Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS) in 2008. The guidance provided good practice guidelines for services for patients with ME/ CFS across both primary and secondary care and was issued to the Health and social Care sector.

The Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency have recently set up a Working Group on Myalgic Encephalomyelitis / Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME CFS) Services. The Group is currently addressing the need to improve the primary care response to the needs of patients with ME/CFS. One of the priorities which the Group is taking forward is a survey of GP attitudes and awareness about ME/CFS. The Group is also considering the need to ensure that GP and other medical training programmes cover ME/CFS management.

Community Pharmacies

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the role of community pharmacies in the evolving new healthcare model.
(AQW 5948/11-15)

Mr Poots: Community pharmacies will have an important role to play in the new healthcare model which will move the care of patients as close to home as possible. Community pharmacists and other care providers have to look at the way they work and consider new arrangements needed to better meet patients' needs and provide a greater range of services which people can access in the community. Subject to negotiation, it is intended to put in place a new community pharmacy contract which will allow pharmacies to offer services in a range of areas including improved medicines management services and health promotion.

Family Planning Association and Life NI: Funding

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will review the imbalance in funding from his Department and the Health and Social Care Board to the Family Planning Association and LifeNI.
(AQW 5976/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department is currently preparing proposals on the future policy for Departmental grant funding to the voluntary sector for my consideration. The proposals aim to ensure equity, effectiveness, value for money and take account of current organisational structures to support the achievement of the Department's key business objectives.

The Health and Social Care Board does not fund either the FPA or Life NI.

Head Lice: Prisons

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) why, when a prisoner who was in custody in Maghaberry Prison for several weeks was found to have head lice, there was no appropriate treatment available; (ii) whether the lack of treatment available is standard practice; and (iii) if he will encourage a review to ensure that the spread of such a condition is minimised.
(AQW 5996/11-15)

Mr Poots: Two prisoners who were sharing a cell in HMP Maghaberry reported having head lice on Sunday, 11 December. They were assessed by a doctor on Monday, 12 December and received treatment on 14 December. The prison pharmacy has been instructed by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to keep treatment for head lice as a stock item in future.

Developmental Dysplasia of the Hip

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how his Department plans to work with the Health and Social Care Trusts to raise awareness among parents and health professionals of Developmental Dysplasia of the Hip and baby hip health.
(AQW 6003/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Personal Child Health Record (PCHR) is given out to all mothers, usually on the day their baby is born. The PCHR, which is held by the parents, contains personal details about the baby such as, name, date of birth, address and name of GP. It also contains information about the health checks and immunisations that the child will be offered. The dates and outcomes of these are recorded in the PCHR by the health visitor, GP or other health professional who carried out the check.

The PCHR has information on Developmental Dysplasia of the HIP (DDH) including risk factors for DDH and the ages at which the infant's hips will be examined. The outcome of each examination and presence or absence of risk factors is recorded in the PCHR.

Responsibility for reviewing and updating the PCHR lies with the Public Health Agency, in conjunction with Trust staff; however, this would incorporate any new policies that may be developed by DHSSPS.

Accident and Emergency Units: Travel Time

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of (i) an acceptable maximum travel time to an Accident and Emergency Unit; and (ii) an acceptable travelling distance to an Accident and Emergency Unit.
(AQW 6004/11-15)

Mr Poots: I do not consider that travel time or travelling distance are as important in an emergency situation as timely and effective interventions by both the NI Ambulance Service and the receiving hospital.

I want the focus to be on patient outcomes rather than distance travelled. This is because each patient is an individual with a specific clinical condition(s) which will require clinical interventions appropriate to that condition(s).

Health Service: Public Relations Consultants

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety which public relations consultants have been retained by the (i) Health and Social Care Board; (ii) Public Health Agency; (iii) and Patient Client Council in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6075/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) The Health and Social Care Board engaged McCann PR in October-December 2011 to handle communications around the Health and Social Care Review.

(ii) The PHA has not retained any Public Relations consultants in the past three years.

(iii) The Patient and Client Council engaged Weber Shandwick from March-June 2010 to undertake a profile raising campaign.

Health Service: Public Relations Consultants

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the costs associated with each public relations consultant retained by the (a) Health and Social Care Board; (b) Public Health Agency; and (c) Patient Client Council in each of the last three years; and (ii) the procurement exercise which was undertaken prior to the appointment of each consultant.
(AQW 6076/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(iv) The Health and Social Care Board engaged PR Consultants in October-November 2011 to handle communications around the Health and Social Care Review at a cost of £8,400. A business case was prepared and approved by DFP for the provision of PR support as part of the Review. The HSCB was in the process of recruiting a Head of Communications post, however, the timescale for this did not meet the needs of the Review and therefore staff substitution was identified as the only option available. This was procured through a single tender through the Procurement and Logistics Service of the Business Services Organisation.

(v) The PHA has not retained any Public Relations consultants in the past three years

(vi) The Patient and Client Council undertook a profile raising campaign in 2010. Part of this involved engagement with a Public Relations consultancy, from March-June, at a cost of £12,000. The consultancy was procured through the Procurement and Logistics Service of the Business Services Organisation.

Health Service: Public Relations Consultants

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) what advice and support the Health and Social Care Board received from public relations consultants during the recent review of Health and Social Care; (ii) the consultants who were engaged; and (iii) the fee charged for work undertaken.
(AQW 6077/11-15)

Mr Poots: A business case was prepared and approved for the use of consultants, including public relations.

(i) Advice and support provided by PR Consultants: Public relations support included:

- preparation and delivery of a communications strategy;
- positive engagement and buy-in of key stakeholders, particularly media;
- creating awareness of the role and purpose of the Review;
- press contact – preparing briefs/releases, and generally ensuring timely and appropriate media contact;
- press clippings service and regular media updates for the Review Team;
- dealing with conflicts of interest and unforeseen incidents;
- delivery of relevant media and public relations plans relating to public meetings, with evaluation and feedback to the Review Team;
- provision of equipment to audio record the event/proceedings;
- liaise with key players in the sector to ensure that attendance at public meetings is encouraged and maximised; and
- manage all of the preparation of the public meetings.

(ii) Consultants engaged: McCann PR

iii) Fee charged for work undertaken: (£8,400

Department of Justice

Vulnerable Adults

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he will consider introducing legislation specifically to protect vulnerable adults from cruelty or neglect.
(AQW 5705/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): My Department is working in partnership with the Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) to develop a Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy Framework. The framework will stipulate a number of policy objectives ranging from the prevention of adult abuse through to the implementation of good protection arrangements (principally by the police and social services) when adult abuse occurs or is suspected. It is intended to issue a draft policy framework for public consultation in March 2012. As this work is taken forward, we will consider with DHSSPS colleagues whether any changes to existing legislation are required to support the policy framework.

Prisons Reform Oversight Group

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice (i) what criteria and process were used to appoint the independent members to the Prison Review Oversight Group; and (ii) what are the anticipated running costs of the Group.
(AQW 5936/11-15)

Mr Ford: The independent members of the Prisons Reform Oversight Group were appointed in line with Recommendation 23 of the final report by the Prison Review Team, which was published on 24 October.

In line with the recommendation Dr Michael Maguire, Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice Northern Ireland, has been appointed to the Oversight Group, along with a Non-Executive Director of the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

I have also taken the decision to appoint an additional two independent members, Duncan McCausland (former Assistant Chief Constable of the PSNI) and Monica McWilliams (former head of Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission), in order to ensure maximum effectiveness of the Oversight Group and to reinforce the independent scrutiny it provides.

I have made the appointments on the basis of the skills and experience which I believe they will bring to the Group.

The Group's running costs are expected to amount only to the cost of expenses for the independent members. However, in line with recommendation 23, I intend to transfer additional resources to Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) to enable CJINI to carry out independent monitoring of outcomes against the Prison Review Team's recommendations. My officials are still assessing the estimated cost of this work.

Drugs: Legal Highs

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) his Department's position on legal highs; (ii) how many people have been (a) arrested; (b) charged; and (c) prosecuted for possessing; and supplying legal highs in each of the last three financial year and this financial year to date.
(AQW 5965/11-15)

Mr Ford: "Legal highs" are substances that have a psychoactive effect but are not currently covered by the Misuse of Drugs Act (MDA) 1971. The MDA 1971 is a reserved matter and my officials continue to liaise with both Home Office and the Secretariat to the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) to ensure that I am informed of any new developments.

One recent development was the introduction in November 2011, under the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, of temporary banning orders to tackle the issue of legal highs across the UK. This allows for any new substance to be banned for 12 months until chemical analysis tests are carried out, to assess the health risks. Records on the numbers arrested, charged or prosecuted for legal highs are not maintained until a substance is placed under a Temporary Banning Order.

Children and Young People: Integrated Services

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Justice what work his Department has carried out, in conjunction with the Department of Education, in relation to the provision of integrated services for children and young people.
(AQW 5983/11-15)

Mr Ford: The importance of education in redirecting young people from offending behaviour is widely recognised and my Department works with the Department of Education in relation to improving learning opportunities for children and young people. The Youth Justice Review recognised that education is one of a number of factors that has a measurable and significant impact on young people's future life chances, including their likelihood or otherwise of engaging in criminal behaviour.

The Youth Justice Agency has established collaborative working relationships with local Education Welfare Officers to support the reintegration of young people into education. My Department has also had input into a Department of Education led Action Plan under the auspices of the Transitions sub-group of the Ministerial Sub Committee on Children and Young People: a number of the action points emphasise the need for joined-up communication across a number of relevant departments.

In June 2011, I convened a video-conference discussion with five schools, on the theme of Hate Crime. Further plans are in progress to extend the schools engagement project, raising awareness and improving knowledge of the criminal justice system.

Officials from my Department and its agencies are members of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, which aims to deliver improved outcomes for children and young people across Northern Ireland through integrated planning and commissioning. Two of the six high level outcomes of the Executive's Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People are 'Enjoying, learning and achieving' and 'Living in safety and with stability', clearly linked to the work of my Department and the Department of Education.

My ambition is to reshape our approach to tackling the factors leading people into criminal behaviour and the obstacles that hinder them from moving away from it. To address this, a Strategic Framework for Reducing Offending is currently being developed and will be published for consultation in March 2012. The strategic framework takes a thematic approach setting out how Government (both within and beyond the justice system) and its partners, working together, can reduce crime and offending behaviour.

Reducing offending cannot be delivered by the justice system alone: it requires a cross-Government approach and the involvement of the voluntary and community sector. It is not possible to separate offending behaviour from underlying factors relating to housing, health, social care, education, or from training and employment.

A background note issued with this answer and is published on page WA 348.

Robert Black: Legal Aid

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to provide (i) an up to date breakdown of the Legal Aid provided for Robert Black; and (ii) an estimate of the final figure including his appeal.
(AQW 5993/11-15)

Mr Ford: The legal aid fees paid to date in respect of the defence of Robert Black are as follows:

PACE (Police Station Advice)	£232.29 (inc. VAT of £34.54)
Magistrates' Court	£1,107.18 (inc. VAT of £164.90)
Crown Court (Counsel)	£39,841.20 (inc. VAT of £6,640.20)
Crown Court (Solicitor)	£307,308.00 (inc. VAT of £50,000)

To date, not all of the claims for payment have been submitted by all of the legal representatives.

This case has been certified as a Very High Cost Case and any further claims will be assessed by the Taxing Master. It is therefore not possible to estimate the final cost with any accuracy at this time.

Sentencing by Video Link

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of sentencing by video-link, particularly when distance is an issue and in view of the savings that could be made.
(AQW 5994/11-15)

Mr Ford: Live link technology can provide a cost-effective and secure means for prisoners to participate in sentencing hearings, where appropriate, without having to be transported to court.

Live link facilities are now widely available in court venues and, in 2011, 603 sentencing hearings were conducted using live link. Decisions on whether it is appropriate to conduct a sentencing hearing via live link are a matter for the court, subject to the prisoner's consent. The court must be satisfied that the arrangement is not contrary to the interests of justice.

Coroner's Office: Access Arrangements

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department will conduct an urgent review of the current access arrangements to the Coroner's Office on Friday evenings, weekends and Bank Holidays; and if his Department will ensure that the bodies of deceased persons are released as soon as possible, including at weekends, to allow families to pay their respects.
(AQW 6005/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Coroners Office is staffed until 5.00 pm on Fridays. The Office is also staffed on Saturdays and public holidays (save for Christmas Day) between 9.30 am to 12.30 pm. At other times, a telephone information service is provided.

A Coroner is also on duty and contactable at all times by telephone outside normal office hours.

The Coroner's initial investigation (prior to the release of deceased remains) is carried out in partnership with a number of agencies and individuals – not all of whom are available at weekends or bank holidays. The opening hours of the Coroners Office have therefore been set to maximise the contact with these services.

In particular, some general practitioners and paediatric pathology services are not available on Friday evenings or weekends and public holidays. In a small number of cases this may cause delay in the release of bodies of deceased persons but every effort is made to prioritise these investigations once services are available.

I am satisfied that the current opening hours and out of hours arrangements for the Coroners Service continue to provide an appropriate level of service to the public and I therefore have no immediate plans to review them.

Maghaberry Prison: Special Supervision Unit

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline the purpose of the Special Supervision Unit in Maghaberry Prison; how many prisoners it can accommodate, and for what reason would a prisoner be placed there.
(AQW 6055/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Special Supervision Unit (SSU) at Maghaberry Prison has been renamed the Care and Supervision Unit (CSU). Its purpose is to hold prisoners placed on specific prison rules in a safe environment and with the appropriate level of care and supervision.

The Unit can accommodate a maximum of 21 prisoners in normal cell accommodation, and up to nine prisoners in non standard cells, where required.

Prisoners can be referred to the Care and Supervision Unit for their own protection and for good order and discipline. They may also be held in the CSU to allow for investigations to be carried out and for adjudications to be conducted. It is usual for adjudication awards such as cellular confinement to be carried out in CSU.

Robert Black: Legal Aid

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in respect of Robert Black's appeal against his murder conviction, whether legal aid will be used to pay for his legal team to consult with him in his English prison or to transport him to Northern Ireland.
(AQW 6056/11-15)

Mr Ford: No appeal has yet been lodged by Robert Black in respect of his conviction for murder or the sentence arising from that conviction.

If an appeal were lodged, and if the Court of Appeal considered that it would be in the interests of justice that he should have legal aid, and his means were insufficient for him to pay the costs of his appeal, Robert Black may be entitled to the provision of criminal legal aid. As part of that entitlement funding may be available to provide travelling expenses for defence lawyers to enable consultations to take place. The legal aid fund does not meet the costs of transporting convicted prisoners.

Prisoners: Education

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Justice to outline his Department's Education Strategy for prisoners, including the links with the Department of Education and the Department for Employment and Learning, with particular reference to young offenders.
(AQW 6063/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service published its Learning and Skills Strategic Plan, covering the period 2010-13, in July 2010. That Plan, which is available in the Publications section of the Department's website, seeks to ensure delivery of learning and skills services that increases prisoners sense of self worth, skill and education levels and reduces reoffending through improved employment opportunities on release. The title of the Plan, "Working Together for Change", illustrates NIPS commitment to working with other Government Departments, including Education and Employment & Learning, to ensure offenders have access to a full range of learning and skills services, including essential skills, literacy, numeracy and ICT. Learning and skills services are available to all prisoners, including young offenders.

Courthouses: Video Facilities

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice which courthouses have video facilities to accommodate vulnerable witnesses.
(AQW 6069/11-15)

Mr Ford: Laganside Courts and Old Town Hall Courthouses in Belfast, together with the Antrim, Armagh, Ballymena, Coleraine, Craigavon, Downpatrick, Dungannon, Enniskillen, Londonderry, Newry, Newtownards and Omagh Courthouses have video facilities to accommodate vulnerable or intimidated witnesses.

Magistrates Courts: Single Jurisdiction

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what consideration is being given to the proposal for a single jurisdiction for Magistrates Courts.
(AQW 6070/11-15)

Mr Ford: On 1 March 2010, the former Northern Ireland Court Service published a consultation paper on a proposal to create a single territorial jurisdiction for Magistrates' Courts and County Courts. It was not possible, however, to legislate for the reform in the last Justice Bill due to time constraints and other priorities.

My officials briefed the Justice Committee on 16 June 2011 on my Department's legislative plans and I will seek to include this reform in a "Faster, Fairer Justice" Bill, which I hope to introduce in mid-2012.

Small Claims Court

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to outline the reasons for the delay in the review of small courts, similar to the reforms to small courts in England and Wales.
(AQW 6071/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Small Claims Court has undergone a number of important reforms over recent years.

Small Claims Online allows claimants to make a small claims application using the Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service (NICTS) website. This service allows members of the public and businesses to make a small claims application outside normal working hours and to track the progress of the application online.

In May 2011, following a review of the jurisdictional limits of the County Courts, the financial limit of the Small Claims Court was increased from £2,000 to £3,000. This increase has allowed more users to avail of this efficient and informal arbitration system.

In 2010 NICTS evaluated the Small Claims Mediation Scheme in England & Wales to assess the benefits it may provide if introduced here. NICTS concluded that a similar in-house mediation scheme for small claims in Northern Ireland would not provide value for money, although this is being kept under review.

Alternative Dispute Resolution: Small Claims Courts

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what plans his Department has to increase the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution in small courts.
(AQW 6072/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am satisfied that the Small Claims Court provides an informal, effective and affordable system of arbitration for the resolution of low value disputes.

Whilst I have no immediate plans to increase the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution in the Small Claims Courts, Alternative Dispute Resolution is a recurring theme throughout the report of the Access to Justice Review, published in September. The report recommends greater use of mediation and other options under Alternative Dispute Resolution. My Department is considering the recommendations carefully, together with the responses received to the report, and will then assess the consequences for the civil justice system, including the court process.

Joint Services College, Desertcreat

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Justice whether the construction tender contract for the Joint Services College at Desertcreat will include the provision of social clauses.
(AQW 6074/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Desertcreat Training College Project Team will be working closely with the Strategic Investment Board, who is leading on the development of Social Clauses for all public sector contracts in Northern Ireland, to ensure that social clauses are built into the tender specification for the College. These will contain requirements in relation to the provisions for apprenticeships, long term unemployed people and SMEs subject to European Procurement regulations.

Prisoner Assessment Unit

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether Prisoner Assessment Unit staff were suspended as a result of the facility's closure; and, if so, (i) on what date; (ii) whether they have since been reinstated, and, if so, on what date, and (iii) what, if any, disciplinary action was taken, and on what charges.
(AQW 6083/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) Prisoner Assessment Unit staff were not suspended as a result of the facility's closure. Two members of staff were suspended subsequent to its closure when it emerged that a prisoner who was residing in the PAU during 2008 had used his prisoner earnings to pay off an alleged drugs debt.

(ii) Two members of staff were suspended on 14 July 2011.

(iii) Both members of staff were reinstated by 6 December 2011.

(iv) Both members of staff were charged under the NIPS Code of Conduct and Discipline for misconduct.

Department for Regional Development

Footpaths: Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to remove broken flagstone footpaths from the Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee.
(AQW 5971/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): My Department's Roads Service has advised that the main footways in Beechfield Avenue are surfaced in asphalt and are in good condition. However, while some areas of footpath are constructed in flagstones, which may be cracked or broken, Roads Service routinely inspects all adopted footways and any recordable defects are noted for repair in line with current maintenance standards. It is Roads Service's longer term objective to replace all flagged footways. However, this is dependent upon the availability of funding and other competing priorities.

Signage: A4 between Stangmore and Ballygawley Roundabout

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development, in light of the incidents of traffic travelling in the wrong direction, what additional signage has been erected on the A4 Dual Carriageway, between Stangmore and Ballygawley Roundabout; and when the signage was installed.
(AQW 6061/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that following incidents of motorists travelling against the flow of traffic on the A4 Dual Carriageway, enhanced signage was provided in September 2011. At each junction "NO ENTRY" was painted onto the carriageway and "NO ENTRY" signs on high visibility backing boards were erected on the off slip roads. On the approaches to the on slip roads, new advance warning signs advising there was a dual carriageway ahead and a white arrow on blue background sign were provided indicating the direction of travel. These signs were followed up by a second warning sign with a white arrow on a blue background confirming entry to a dual carriageway.

Details of further proposed safety improvements to be provided early in 2012, are currently being finalised.

DRD: Christmas Cards

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Regional Development to list all the recipients of official departmental Christmas cards signed by him, or his predecessor, in each year since 2007.
(AQW 6090/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The names of the recipients of official departmental Christmas cards signed by me or my predecessor, in each year from May 2007 are listed in the tables below. Ten cards were sent to private individuals. It would not be appropriate to provide such names.

2007

- Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton and staff
- Office of Governor Eliot Spitzer
- Office of the Comptroller of the City of New York
- Mr John Gormley, TD
- Mr Noel Dempsey, TD
- Managing Director, Belfast International Airport
- Chief Executive, George Best Belfast City Airport
- Managing Director, Larne Harbour Ltd
- Chairman and Chief Executive, Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners
- Chairman and Chief Executive, Warrenpoint Harbour Authority
- Chairman, Coleraine Harbour Authority
- Chairman, Carlingford Lough Commission
- Chairman and Chief Executive, Belfast Harbour Commissioners
- Town Clerk & Chief Executive, Derry City Council
- An Nasc - a community based Irish language development organisation, based in West Belfast
- Chairman and Chief Executive Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company
- Chief Executive, Consumer Council
- Panel members and staff, Independent Water Review
- Chairman, Vice Chairman and Members of the West Belfast & Greater Shankill Enterprise Council
- Rural Development Council
- Chairman, Rathlin Development and Community Association
- Royal Society Protection Birds Northern Ireland
- Campaign for the Protection of the Countryside
- Woodland Trust
- North West Stakeholders Alliance
- Northern Ireland Local Government Association
- Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee
- WB Senior Citizens Association
- Countryside Alliance Ireland
- Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations
- Royal Society of Ulster Architects
- The National Trust (NI)
- Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors
- Council for the Nature Conservation and the Countryside
- Ulster Wildlife Trust Organisation
- Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association
- Ulster Farmers Union
- Northern Ireland Environment Link
- Friends of the Earth
- Rural Community Network
- Young Farmers Clubs for Ulster
- Workspace (Draperstown) Ltd
- Comhairlr Uladh CLG
- News Letter
- General Manager Irish Echo
- Daily Mirror
- Press Association
- BBC
- Irish Times
- Irish News
- Belfast Telegraph
- UTV Newsroom
- Andersonstown News
- Feile FM
- No cards sent to private individuals.

2008

- Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton and staff
- Office of Governor Eliot Spitzer
- Office of the Comptroller of the City of New York
- Mr John Gormley, TD
- Mr Noel Dempsey, TD
- Mayor of Toronto
- President Mary McAleese
- Taoiseach Brian Cowen, TD
- Éamon Ó Cuív, TD
- Pádraig Ó hUigínn, TD
- Alex Salmond, MSP
- Chair, Members and Clerk of the Regional Development Committee
- Managing Director, Belfast International Airport
- Chief Executive, George Best Belfast City Airport
- Managing Director, Larne Harbour Ltd
- Chairman and Chief Executive, Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners
- Chairman and Chief Executive, Warrenpoint Harbour Authority
- Chairman Coleraine Harbour Authority
- Chairman Carlingford Lough Commission
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- Chairman, Vice Chairman and Members of the West Belfast & Greater Shankill Enterprise Council
- Rural Development Council
- Chairman Rathlin Development and Community Association
- Royal Society Protection Birds Northern Ireland
- Campaign for the Protection of the Countryside
- Woodland Trust
- North West Stakeholders Alliance

- Northern Ireland Local Government Association
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- Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations
- Royal Society of Ulster Architects
- The National Trust (NI)
- Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors
- Economic and Social Research Institute
- Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside
- Ulster Wildlife Trust Organisation
- Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association
- Ulster Farmers Union
- Northern Ireland Environment Link
- Friends of the Earth
- Rural Community Network
- Young Farmers Clubs for Ulster
- Workspace (Draperstown) Ltd
- Comhairlr Uladh CLG
- Ulster Architectural Heritage Society
- Chairman, Westlink 10k Run Organising Committee
- Emerald Development Managers Limited
- Sport Northern Ireland
- Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Hospice Care
- Director, Confederation of British Industry
- POBAL
- Lá Nua
- North/South Ministerial Council
- Assistant General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions
- Vice Chancellors Office, Queen's University Belfast
- Ulster Council GAA
- Director of Transport, Irish Business and Employers Confederation
- Cathaoirleach, Armagh County Board
- UNISON
- Newry Chamber of Commerce & Trade
- Niall Mellon Township Trust
- Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation
- Sustrans Northern Ireland
- Chief Executive, Newry Chamber of Commerce
- Chief Executive, Millennium Centre
- Vice Chairman, IMTAC
- Chairman and Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Water
- Delegation General of Palestine
- Secretary General, Department of Transport
- Committee Chairman, Down GAA
- News Letter
- General Manager, Irish Echo
- Daily Mirror
- Press Association
- BBC
- Irish Times
- Belfast Telegraph
- UTV Newsroom
- Andersonstown News
- Feile FM
- Radio Failte
- 4 cards sent to private individuals.

2009

- Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton and staff
- Office of Governor Eliot Spitzer
- Office of the Comptroller of the City of New York
- Mr John Gormley TD
- Mr Noel Dempsey TD
- House Chair, Massachusetts House of Representatives
- President Mary McAleese
- Taoiseach, Brian Cowen TD
- Éamon Ó Cuív TD
- Pádraig Ó hUigínn TD
- Paul Clark MP
- Alex Salmond MSP
- Chair, Members and Clerk of the Regional Development Committee
- South African Embassy in Ireland
- Embassy of the Republic of Cuba
- Managing Director, Belfast International Airport
- Chief Executive, George Best Belfast City Airport
- Managing Director, Larne Harbour Ltd
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- Chairman and Chief Executive, Consumer Council
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- Chairman, Vice Chairman and Members, West Belfast & Greater Shankill Enterprise Council
- Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Water
- Rural Development Council
- Chairman, Rathlin Development and Community Association
- Royal Society Protection Birds Northern Ireland
- Campaign for the Protection of the Countryside
- Woodland Trust
- North West Stakeholders Alliance

- Northern Ireland Local Government Association
- Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee
- WB Senior Citizens Association
- Countryside Alliance Ireland
- Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations
- Royal Society of Ulster Architects
- The National Trust (NI)
- Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors
- Economic and Social Research Institute
- Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside
- Ulster Wildlife Trust Organisation
- Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association
- Ulster Farmers Union
- Northern Ireland Environment Link
- Friends of the Earth
- Rural Community Network
- Comhairlr Uladh CLG
- Ulster Architectural Heritage Society
- Chairman, Westlink 10k Run Organising Committee
- Emerald Development Managers Limited
- Sport Northern Ireland
- Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Hospice Care
- Chairman and Director, Confederation of British Industries
- POBAL
- North/South Ministerial Council
- Assistant General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions
- Vice Chancellors Office, Queen's University Belfast
- Ulster Council GAA
- Director of Transport, Irish Business and Employers Confederation
- Cathaoirleach, Armagh County Board
- UNISON
- Newry Chamber of Commerce & Trade
- Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation
- Sustrans Northern Ireland
- Chief Executive, Newry Chamber of Commerce
- Chairman and Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Water
- Community Development Manager, Lawrence, Massachusetts
- Chief Executive Officer, The Logan Office Centre
- Community Places, Belfast
- President, Belfast Chamber of Trade & Commerce
- President, Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce
- City Centre Manager, Belfast City Centre Management Company
- Director, International Centre for Local and Regional Development
- Chairman, Belfast City Centre Management Company
- President, Londonderry Chamber of Commerce
- Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce
- Cares Director, Business in the Community
- Chief Executive Officer, ILEX
- Chief Executive, Londonderry Chamber of Commerce
- Rathlin Island Ferry Limited
- Chair and Divisional Director, Institute of Directors
- Director, Coiste Nalarchimi
- School of Business, Ulster University
- Foyle View School, Londonderry
- Rathore School, Newry
- Non Executive Directors of the Regional Development Board
- Secretary General, Department of Transport
- Committee Chairman, Down GAA
- News Letter
- General Manager, Irish Echo
- Daily Mirror
- Press Association
- BBC
- Irish Times
- UTV Newsroom
- Andersonstown News
- Radio Failte
- 3 cards sent to private individuals.

2010

- Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton
- Office of Governor Eliot Spitzer
- Office of the Comptroller of the City of New York
- Mr John Gormley TD
- Mr Noel Dempsey TD
- House Chair, Massachusetts House of Representatives
- President Mary McAleese
- Mike Penning MP
- Chair, Members and Clerk of the Regional Development Committee
- South African Embassy in Ireland
- Embassy of the Republic of Cuba
- Belfast Lord Mayor
- Managing Director, Belfast International Airport
- Chairman, City of Derry Airport
- Chief Executive, George Best Belfast City Airport
- Managing Director, Larne Harbour Ltd
- Chairman and Chief Executive, Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners
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- Chairman, Coleraine Harbour Authority
- Chairman, Carlingford Lough Commission
- Chairman and Chief Executive, Belfast Harbour Commissioners
- Town Clerk & Chief Executive, Derry City Council
- An Nasc - a community based Irish language development organisation, based in West Belfast
- Chairman and Chief Executive Northern Ireland

Transport Holding Company
- Chairman and Chief Executive, Consumer Council
- Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Water
- Rural Development Council
- Chairman, Rathlin Development and Community Association
- Royal Society Protection Birds Northern Ireland
- Campaign for the Protection of the Countryside
- Woodland Trust
- North West Stakeholders Alliance
- Northern Ireland Local Government Association
- Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee
- WB Senior Citizens Association
- Countryside Alliance Ireland
- Northern Ireland of Federation Housing Associations
- Royal Society of Ulster Architects
- The National Trust (NI)
- Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors
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- Ulster Wildlife Trust Organisation
- Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association
- Ulster Farmers Union
- Northern Ireland Environment Link
- Friends of the Earth
- Rural Community Network
- Comhairlr Uladh CLG
- Ulster Architectural Heritage Society
- Sport Northern Ireland
- Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Hospice Care
- POBAL
- North/South Ministerial Council
- Assistant General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions
- Vice Chancellors Office, Queen's University Belfast
- Ulster Council GAA
- Director of Transport, Irish Business and Employers Confederation
- Cathaoirleach, Armagh County Board
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- Sustrans Northern Ireland
- Chief Executive, Newry Chamber of Commerce
- Community Development Manager, Lawrence, Massachusetts
- Chief Executive, The Logan Office Centre
- Community Places, Belfast
- President of Belfast Chamber of Trade & Commerce
- President, Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce
- City Centre Manager, Belfast City Centre Management Company
- Director, International Centre for Local and Regional Development
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- Cares Director, Business in the Community
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- Chairman, Confederation of British Industry
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- General Manager, Irish Echo
- Daily Mirror
- Press Association
- BBC
- Irish Times
- Belfast Telegraph
- UTV Newsroom
- Andersonstown News
- Radio Failte
- 3 cards sent to private individuals.

2011
- Mike Penning MP
- The Rt Hon Theresa Villiers MP
- Leo Varadkar TD
- Jim Nicholson MEP
- Bairbre de Brun MEP
- Dianne Dodds MEP
- Speaker for the Northern Ireland Assembly
- Roy Beggs MLA
- Ross Hussey MLA
- Danny Kinahan MLA
- David McNarry MLA
- Sandra Overend MLA
- Michael Copeland MLA
- Jo-Anne Dobson MLA
- Michael McGimpsey MLA
- Robin Swann MLA
- John McCallister MLA
- Samuel Gardiner MLA
- Basil McCrea MLA
- Mike Nesbitt MLA
- Leslie Cree MBE, MLA
- Tom Elliott MLA

- Chair of the Committee for Regional Development
- Managing Director, Belfast International Airport
- Airport Manager, City of Derry Airport
- Chief Executive, George Best Belfast City Airport
- Managing Director, Larne Harbour Ltd
- Chairman and Chief Executive, Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners
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- Northern Ireland Environment Link
- National Manager, Sustrans Northern Ireland
- President, Belfast Chamber of Trade & Commerce
- President, Londonderry Chamber of Commerce
- Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors
- Chief Executive, Newry Chamber of Commerce
- Chairman and Director, Confederation of British Industries
- Chairman and City Centre Manager, Belfast City Centre Management Company
- Chief Executive, Londonderry Chamber of Commerce
- Chair and Divisional Director, Institute of Directors
- Chief Executive, ILEX
- Secretary General, Department of Transport
- No cards sent to private individuals.

Department for Social Development

State Pension Branch

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many staff in his Department have been refused a transfer to the proposed State Pension Service in Londonderry.
(AQW 5733/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The identification of staff to fill vacancies arising in State Pension Branch as a result of its relocation to Londonderry is being undertaken in line with an agreed Recruitment, Training and Redeployment Strategy. A number of posts remain to be filled but at 20 December 2011 records indicate that there were 18 staff from my Department who had expressed an interest in one of the relocated posts but whose interest could not be accommodated. Of that 18, 17 currently work in Londonderry and one in Omagh.

Housing: Service Personnel

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development what assessment of need his Department has undertaken to determine the number of serving, or ex-service, personnel who would wish to purchase or rent properties, transferred to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister from the Ministry of Defence; and what steps he has taken to ensure that such demand is met.
(AQW 5738/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has no record of any enquiries or representations either from or on behalf of serving or ex service personnel in relation to the St Patrick's Barracks site in Ballymena which is the only site transferred to OFMDFM that will include housing so far.

Housing Executive Properties: Asbestos

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department has any plans to remove asbestos from Housing Executive properties.
(AQW 5755/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Asbestos containing materials were used extensively in social housing from the 1950s to the 1980s. The materials were most commonly used in roof coverings, soffit boards, lagging, flue pipes, floor coverings, insulation, panels and drip trays. The Housing Executive's management of asbestos uses three approaches:-

- Leaving the asbestos containing materials undisturbed
- Treating the surface of or enclosing the asbestos containing materials
- Removing the asbestos containing materials

The approach is determined by a risk assessment undertaken as part of a survey exercise. Any planned scheme of works includes an asbestos survey and subsequent management plan, to assess which of the above approaches is best suited.

Housing Executive Properties: Double Glazing

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the provision of double-glazed windows in Housing Executive properties in the Donegall Pass area of South Belfast.
(AQW 5756/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive currently installs double glazing as part of its External Cyclical Maintenance programme. Extra funding secured through the monitoring round has enabled an increase in this activity. The Housing Executive is working to identify any properties which still require double glazing and once this information is available, as required in the draft Programme for Government, by March 2012 it will prepare a programme for the installation of glazing to all Housing Executive homes by the end of 2015.

A scheme to install double glazing in the Donegall Pass area has been identified. Although not yet programmed it is likely to go on site in the latter half of 2012/13.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to provide an estimate of the cost to his Department of the Winter Fuel Payment in 2011/12.
(AQW 5796/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The latest estimate for expenditure on Winter Fuel Payments for 2011/12 is £54.996 million.

Welfare Reform: IT Systems

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the cost to his Department of the new computer systems that are required to administer the changes to Welfare Reform.
(AQW 5797/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The costs of the new computer systems that are required to administer the changes to Welfare Reform are not yet known. The systems are being developed by the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Social Development will be required to pay for any Northern Ireland specific requirements and a proportionate share of operating costs. It is likely that a number of system releases will be scheduled over a number of years to deliver the full IT capability required to administer the changes. It will therefore be some considerable time before the full extent of the costs are available.

Incapacity Benefit: Migration to Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of people, to date, who have been moved onto Job Seekers Allowance from Incapacity Benefit as a result of reassessment, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 5822/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Currently the number of people who have completed the Incapacity Benefit Reassessment journey remains relatively small. Work is continuing to validate data on systems operated by my Department and the Department for Employment and Learning and it is anticipated that more complete and robust management information will be available in early 2012. It is therefore not possible, at this time, to provide the information in the format requested.

Housing Executive Properties: Heating

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what plans his Department has to replace the current heating systems in properties in the Victoria area of Donaghadee to more energy efficient heating systems.
(AQW 5848/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive currently own 46 dwellings in Victoria estate, Donaghadee. Of these 46 properties, 35 already have oil or gas heating. Seven tenants have refused a change of heating during recent schemes. The remaining four dwellings have open fires and are included in a heating replacement scheme which is programmed to start early in the 2012/13 financial year.

Public Procurement

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what plans his Department has for better financial results through an improved contract procurement process.
(AQW 5851/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In accordance with Public Procurement Policy, as agreed by the NI Executive, public procurement is predominately acquired by means of a contractual arrangement following public competition to ensure best value for money.

In line with this Policy, my Department seeks to ensure that public procurement is competitively tendered, where appropriate, via a Centre of Procurement Expertise (Department of Finance and Personnel – Central Procurement Directorate). Consideration is given to the most advantageous combination of cost, quality and sustainability to ensure best value for money to meet requirements.

Work Capability Assessment: Mental Health Issues

Mr McCallister asked the Minister for Social Development to detail how mental health issues are currently assessed within the Work Capability Assessment.
(AQW 5883/11-15)

Mr McCausland: All customers with mental health issues will undergo a Work Capability Assessment. The assessment is used to assess functional capability for work. It includes completion of a questionnaire by the customer and a paper scrutiny of all available medical evidence by a trained Health Care Professional to establish the customers' functional capability to work.

Only those customers whose capability cannot be established during this assessment will require a face to face medical assessment. Where a medical assessment is necessary, it will be provided by an appropriately trained Health Care Professional who has access to a specially trained Mental Health Care expert. The Health Care Professional will consider all the information provided and exercise clinical judgement to reach an opinion on the nature and severity of the effects of the mental health condition on the customers' ability to work.

Homelessness

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development what action his Department is taking to deal with the increasing number of homeless people who are sleeping rough.
(AQW 5889/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In Northern Ireland the propensity to rough sleep is confined largely to Belfast and to a much lesser extent Londonderry. Applying the Department for Local Government's (DCLG) guidance on counting rough sleepers I can advise that fewer than 10 individuals rough sleep in Belfast on a given night. This represents no notable change in the position over recent years. There are, however, up to 100 individuals who could sleep rough regularly if appropriate services were not provided. These include crisis accommodation, crash bed facilities and street outreach services.

Housing Executive Properties: Double Glazing

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many homes in the North Down area will benefit from the proposal in the draft Programme for Government to install double glazing in all Housing Executive properties.
(AQW 5972/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as a number of double glazing schemes were carried out prior to the introduction of computerised recording systems and therefore the Housing Executive's records on the level of double glazing in its stock is incomplete. However, it is estimated that approximately 50% of the stock already has some degree of double glazing.

The Housing Executive currently installs double glazing as part of its External Cyclical Maintenance programme. Extra funding secured through the monitoring round has enabled an increase in this activity. The Housing Executive is working to identify those additional properties which still require double glazing. Once this information is available, as required in the draft Programme for Government, by March 2012 it will prepare a programme for the installation of glazing to all Housing Executive homes by the end of 2015.

All Housing Executive dwellings in North Down which currently have single glazing will benefit from these proposals.

Small Pockets of Deprivation Programme: Rathgill Estate, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how his Department plans to protect the funding for the Small Pockets of Deprivation programme in the Rathgill Estate area in Bangor.
(AQW 5974/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I have committed funding to the Neighbourhood Renewal and Small Pockets of Deprivation (SPOD) Programmes until 31 March 2015. The NIHE administers the SPOD programme on behalf of my Department and has recently been involved in meetings with all groups in receipt of SPOD funding. The purpose of these meetings has been to outline the essential criteria required for applications to secure funding for the next 3 years from the SPOD programme.

Applications for funding, or continuation funding, for all SPOD projects, including those involving salary costs for community workers, will be assessed to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the area and offer value for money.

The key issues for the Rathgill area have been identified as:

- Youth related issues such as Anti Social Behaviour and Substance Abuse;
- Educational underachievement;
- Health/Mental health;
- Old Age Pensioner issues; and
- Community Cohesion.

Rathgill Community Association will be required to make an application which clearly demonstrates how it intends to address the key issues in the Rathgill area with clearly defined targets and outcomes. It is also essential that the Rathgill Community

Association defines how it will measure achievement of the outcomes. All applications should be received by 31 December 2011. Unless Rathgill Community Association and all other groups in receipt of SPOD funding are prepared to submit applications which meet these requirements there cannot be a guarantee of future funding.

Derelict Commercial Properties: Village Urban Renewal Area, Belfast

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on any negotiations his Department has carried out with a view to acquiring or vesting derelict commercial properties at Broadway in the Village urban renewal area, Belfast.
(AQW 6031/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Commercial premises at 167-171 Broadway were excluded from the initial vesting application. The property has since become vacant and at the request of the local community, Fold Housing Association has commenced negotiations with the owner of this property and the owners of two adjoining residential dwellings 173 and 175 Broadway, to see if they can acquire them by voluntary agreement. These negotiations are at an early stage and if they can be acquired, the site will be used to complement plans already established to regenerate this area. However if negotiations cannot find an amicable solution, there are no plans to vest the units as they are not integral to the work already underway in the area.

Transfer of Stock: Lysander Park and Rathmullan Drive, Newtownards

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the proposed transfer of stock at Lysander Park and Rathmullan Drive, Newtownards.
(AQW 6059/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The properties at Lysander Park are to be demolished and the vacant land transferred to a Housing Association for a new build scheme of family homes. Some planning issues have delayed demolition but I expect those to be overcome in the coming weeks and expect to have more positive news on this when I visit the area early in the New Year.

All of the Housing Executive flats and shops at Rathmullan Drive are now vacant. Again we plan to demolish the units and transfer the vacant land on a similar basis as Lysander Park. Whilst all the units are now vacant, one flat is privately owned and the Housing Executive have not yet been able to reach agreement with the owner to acquire it. The issue is further complicated as the owner lives abroad however I am assured progress is being made and will be happy to keep the Member updated as this matter concludes hopefully in the coming months.

Department of Justice

Children and Young People: Integrated Services

(AQW 5983/11-15)

The following background note was published along with the answer (see page WA 336).

Background

The Department does not provide integrated services for children and young people per se, but a number of aspects of cross-Departmental work feed into improving educational prospects for children and young people, helping them avoid offending behaviour, both as children and later in life.

The Youth Justice Agency seeks to maximise uptake of education and training opportunities to increase the number of young people within education, employment or training. Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre is represented on the Transitions sub-group of the Ministerial Sub Committee on Children and Young People, with a key aim of improving joined-up communication across DHSSPS, DEL, DE and our Department.

It is hoped to extend the schools engagement project early in 2012, with modules built into a number of courses across a range of subjects, to improve knowledge and raise awareness of the criminal justice system, ultimately promoting confidence in the fairness and effectiveness of the system.

The Youth Justice Agency, the Community Safety Unit, Police and Probation are all represented on the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership. A key strategic priority for the Partnership is Early Intervention, which is also an important element of the Prevention and Diversion theme of the Strategic Framework for Reducing Offending.

An early draft of the Reducing Offending Strategic Framework was presented to PSG in July 2011 and Nick Perry is writing to Permanent Secretaries individually to update them on progress. The Framework will be discussed at the Justice Committee on 12 January and you will be engaging with relevant Ministers in February to discuss how a cross-cutting approach can be progressed.

Earlier this year, you met with representatives from Integrated Services for Children and Young People, a group aiming to improve the life chances of young people in North and West Belfast by developing effective integration across the full range of children and young people services. You noted your support of the aims of the group, the services offered and its concurrence with the Department's interest in promoting a joined-up approach to reducing offending. References to Integrated Services for Children and Young People are not made in this answer, because DOJ has not provided funding and the question doesn't specifically mention the Service. Information is included here for completeness and should further queries arise.

Drafted by: Edel Hendry
Cleared by: Brian Grzymek

cc list:

Nick Perry
Peter May
John Todd
Tony Kavanagh
Avril Galloway
George Lowry
Barbara McAtamney
Emma Hawthorne
Richard Good

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 13 January 2012

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Social Protection Fund

Mr D Bradley asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much of the £20 million Social Protection Fund will be allocated in advance of the January 2012 Monitoring Round.
(AQW 3846/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Executive proposed a Social Protection Fund (SPF) to mitigate the impact of the financial cuts on the most vulnerable in our society.

Acknowledging that exceptional circumstances existed in relation to vulnerable individuals as a result of the impact of increased household energy costs, including on those who are already likely to experience high levels of fuel poverty, the Executive subsequently identified the delivery of a Winter Poverty Payment Scheme as the key priority this year for the Social Protection Fund.

On 8 December the Executive further agreed that the full £20 million SPF budget would be used to contribute towards the Winter Poverty Payment Scheme which will be distributed through DSD and DHSSPS. It is expected that payments will be made in early February 2012.

Capital Investment

Ms S Ramsey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for a breakdown of the gross capital investment of £1.4 billion in 2007-08 as outlined in the draft Programme for Government.
(AQW 5575/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The £1.4 billion gross capital investment for 2007-08 referred to in the draft Programme for Government relates to the final outturn for that year. This is detailed by department in the table below:

Department/ Office	2007-08 £m
Assembly Ombudsman and NI Commissioner for Complaints	24
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development	56,341
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure	28,069
Department of Education	165,464
Department for Employment and Learning	54,301
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment	46,795
Department of Finance and Personnel	51,099
Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety	192,500
Department of the Environment	10,280
Department for Rural Development	377,641
Department for Social Development	402,700
Food Standards Agency	21
NI Assembly	1,817
NI Audit Office	325

Department/ Office	2007-08 £m
NI Authority for Utility Regulation	80
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister	2,711
Total	**1,390,168**

Child Poverty

Mr Gardiner asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how successfully the previous Programme for Government targets were met in relation to tackling child poverty.
(AQO 984/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A Monitoring Framework for Lifetime Opportunities, the broad architecture and principles of which the previous Executive adopted as its anti poverty and social inclusion strategy, was published on the 14th October 2010.

Detailed within the Monitoring Framework was an assessment of progress against the Programme for Government commitment to reduce by half child relative income poverty by 2010/11.

We measure poverty in three different ways – relative, mixed and absolute. The assessment contained within the Monitoring Framework was that, whilst child relative income poverty rates had fallen in comparison to the 1998/99 baseline, on the basis of current trends, it is unlikely that the rate of child relative income poverty would be halved by 2010/11. However, the table below shows the decrease in absolute child poverty:

Year	Absolute poverty %
1998/99	29
2002/03	19
2003/04	16
2004/05	17
2005/06	17
2006/07	12
2007/08	16
2008/09	17
2009/10	18

The most up to date levels of child poverty here are outlined within the latest Family Resources Survey (2009/10) which was published on 30 November 2011 and we will take full account of this information when finalising our Child Poverty Strategy Action Plan.

The Child Poverty Act 2010 requires us to lay annual reports before the Assembly. We will publish our first Annual Report in March 2012, and this will set out the progress we have made towards eradicating child poverty by 2020.

Decade of Commemorations

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what preparations are being made to mark the upcoming decade of commemorations in a shared manner; and whether they are examining the proposed approaches of other institutions such as Belfast City Council.
(AQW 5988/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: This year will be the start of a decade of centenary anniversaries of seminal events and significant milestones in the shared history of the UK and Ireland.

The manner in which these historic events are marked publicly will be very important in preserving the current stability and in building a peaceful, stable and shared future. The Assembly, working together with the British and Irish Governments, along with local councils and other interested groups can ensure that the events are marked in appropriate and sensitive ways.

The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has established a Project Steering Group to commemorate the 400th and 100th anniversaries that occur in the period 2012-2022. It will be focusing on key themes including: Plantation; Titanic; and 1912-1922.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Queen Elizabeth II: Diamond Jubilee

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding opportunities her Department provides to community groups who wish to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.
(AQW 5939/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I am supportive of an inclusive approach to commemorations. I endorse the principles developed by the Community Relations Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund to remember the past in the context of an inclusive and accepting society.

My officials explored the potential of the Community Festival Fund being used by local councils to support community-led commemorative activities. Some councils were supportive while others expressed concern this would impact on their ability to assist the diverse range of community events already supported by the Fund. Therefore individual councils can decide whether to support commemorative activity but they should engage with the Community Relations Council and Heritage Lottery Fund to ensure an inclusive approach.

Habitats Directive

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, given the concerns about Northern Ireland's breach of international commitments and the EU Habitats Directive, whether she intends to issue licences this year for the netting of salmon off the coast.
(AQW 6226/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Departmental officials have written to all DCAL licensed commercial fishermen operating coastal fishing engines asking that they do not apply for renewal of their licences in 2012. If they agree to do so this would result in a temporary voluntary cessation of commercial coastal salmon fishing.

The Department awaits the responses of the operators and will consider the way forward in light of those responses.

Department of Education

Preschool Places

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education, given that the Executive has pledged to provide pre-school places for all children and that Orchard County Primary School, Portadown, has received a total of 34 applicants to avail of nursery provision in September 2012 but is unable to provide sufficient places, why he has rejected the school's application for increased facilities.
(AQW 4774/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The Draft Programme for Government includes a commitment to provide one year of funded pre-school education for every child whose parent wants to avail of it. This is consistent with the aim of the Department's Pre-School Education Expansion Programme (PSEEP), which was launched in 1998.

In the 2011/2012 school year there are over 23,000 children in funded pre-school education provision and DE is currently working with Education and Library Boards to ensure an adequate number of funded pre-school places are available in future years. If necessary, additional capacity in the pre-school education sector may be achieved through several options such as the creation of new/additional statutory nursery units or by the allocation of additional funded places in voluntary and private pre-school settings participating in the PSEEP.

I had initially turned down a proposal to establish a new nursery unit at Orchard County PS as the original analysis of the development proposal suggested that the existing provision in the area was sufficient. Subsequently, an error was discovered in the information originally presented to me in the statistical data used to calculate the existing level of provision in the area.

Having reviewed the information, I announced on 21 December 2011, that I had approved the establishment of a 26 place part-time nursery unit at Orchard County PS. No other development proposals are affected by this error.

Preschool Places

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Education, in light of the commitment in the draft Programme for Government, (i) when there will be enough preschool places to meet demand; and (ii) whether he will remove the criteria that gives preference to those children with birthdays in July and August and those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, so that the entrance criteria is similar to that for entrance into P1.
(AQW 5930/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Draft Programme for Government includes a commitment to provide one year of funded pre-school education for every child whose parent wants to avail of it. This is consistent with the aim of the Department's Pre-School Education Expansion Programme (PSEEP) which was launched in 1998.

The pre-school year is a non-compulsory phase of education. In the 2011/2012 school year there are over 23,000 children in funded pre-school education provision. However, it is not always possible to make a place available in the setting expressed by a parent as the first preference.

DE is currently working with Education and Library Boards to ensure an adequate number of funded pre-school places are available in future years. If necessary, additional capacity in the pre-school education sector may be achieved through several options such as the creation of new/additional statutory nursery units or by the allocation of additional funded places in voluntary and private pre-school settings participating in the PSEEP.

The review of pre-school which I announced in the Assembly in June has looked at the arrangements for admission to pre-school, including the operation of the two priority criteria referred to in the question. I am currently considering the report and plan to make an announcement on this review shortly.

Irish-medium Sector

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of how the quality of children's education in the Irish-medium sector would be affected if the responsibility of translating the Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment documents for the Irish-medium sector were to be transferred to teachers in the Irish-medium sector.
(AQW 6113/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: While the IM sector will continue to develop materials to support the education of pupils, it is important that the demands of this do not take up too large a proportion of teachers' time. Therefore, in line with the recommendations of the Review of Irish Medium Education, my Department commissioned the Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) to increase the availability of curriculum support materials for the IM sector.

This programme supports all IM primary and post primary schools/units. Since 2009 a wide range and substantial volume of curricular resources have been developed and CCEA has engaged with representive groups and practitioners to identify priorities and work programmes and outcomes have reflected this.

Placing responsibility for this and CCEA's other work in support of the IM sector on examinations and statutory assessment for example, directly on to schools would represent an unacceptable burden and would risk having a significant negative impact on pupils' education.

Irish-medium Preschools

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail the percentage increase from 2001 to 2011 in the number of pupils attending Irish-medium (i) pre-schools; (ii) naiscoilleanna ; (iii) bunscoilleanna ; (iv) meanscoilleanna; and (v) units in English-medium post-primary schools.
(AQW 6114/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Enrolments in Irish medium education in 2001/02 and 2011/12

Year	Voluntary and private pre-school centres[1]	Nursery units in primary schools[2]	Primary3		Post primary	
			Schools	Units	Schools	Units
2001/02	338	n/a	1,421	n/a	342	n/a
2011/12	473	284	2,191	682	550	212
Increase in numbers	135	n/a	770	n/a	208	n/a
% increase	39.9	n/a	54.2	n/a	60.8	n/a

Source: School census

Note:

1 Figures for voluntary and private pre-school centres relate to funded pupils only.

2 Figures for nursery classes in primary schools include 26 pupils who are enrolled in an Irish medium unit at an English Medium school.

3 Figures for primary schools include children in reception and Year 1 – Year 7 classes.

4 Figures for enrolments in Irish medium units were not collected in 2001/02.

Primary Languages Programme

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail the schools which have availed of the Primary Languages Programme in each of the last three years, including the languages chosen by each school.
(AQW 6115/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have arranged for the Information requested to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Area-based Planning

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education whether the terms of reference for the area-based planning process will include investigating creative, shared education models.
(AQW 6151/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have commissioned the Education and Library Boards, working in close conjunction with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and engaging extensively with other school sectors, to develop collective strategic plans on an area basis. The terms of reference for the area planning were issued to the Boards and CCMS on 15 December 2011 and can be accessed on my Department's website.

One of the aims/objectives under the Terms of Reference is to identify realistic, innovative and creative solutions to address need, including opportunities for shared schooling on a cross sectoral basis. However, the degrees of sharing may be different to reflect local circumstances.

I have also given a commitment in the draft Programme for Government to establish a Ministerial advisory group to explore and bring forward recommendations before the end of 2012/13 to advance shared education. I aim to establish this group by 1 April 2012.

Education and Skills Authority: Implementation Team

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the role of the Education and Skills Authority Implementation Team (ESAIT) in the transition to the Education and Skills Authority (ESA); (ii) the cost of ESAIT to date; and (iii) the projected cost of ESAIT in the period up to ESA becoming (a) operational and (b) fully functioning.
(AQW 6170/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The ESA Implementation Team was created to support the design of, and transition to, the Education and Skills Authority (ESA).

This work includes the design of a single new regional authority to replace the current organisations, modernising a range of existing services and upgrading ICT in a number of areas including Finance and HR.

The original implementation date for ESA was 1 April 2008. Subsequent implementation dates were 1 April 2009 and 1 January 2010. Despite delays, the Department still required to plan for the implementation of ESA

The cost of ESAIT to date is shown in the table below, as provided in response to AQW 972/11

	05-06 £'000	06-07 £'000	07-08 £'000	08-09 £000	09-10 £'000	10-11* £'000	Totals £'000
ESA Implementation Team	-	258	1,032	1,909	2,697	2,314	8,210

* Figures for 2010-11 are as at 31 March 2011 and are unaudited.
ESAIT's budget for the current financial year is £1.736m.
The budget exercise for the 2012-13 financial year has not yet started.
When ESA is operational, ESAIT will cease to exist.

Education and Skills Authority: Senior Management

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education to detail the role of Education and Library Board senior management in the transition to the Education and Skills Authority.
(AQW 6172/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The transition to ESA is a major reform programme which affects the whole of the education sector. The leaders of the current organisations have an important role to ensure that their organisations continue to operate effectively during the transition period, delivering services in line with the Department's policies and ensuring staff are well prepared for transition.

The ESA Chair and CEO Designate will engage regularly with the Senior Management Teams in the affected organisations to seek their views on the way forward.

ESAIT will also require the support and participation of senior management and their staff in the organisations as project teams are created to develop the regional services for ESA.

It is important that the organisations work together with the ESA Implementation Team.

Education and Skills Authority

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education to outline the difference between the Education and Skills Authority being operational and fully functioning.
(AQW 6173/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There is no substantive difference between the meaning of the terms 'operational' and 'fully functioning' in relation to the Education and Skills Authority. Their use in the draft Programme for Governance indicates that the ESA will be established by 1st April 2013, and will be fully functioning from that point on.

Community Relations, Equality and Diversity

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for an update on progress made against the five key actions outlined in his Department's Community Relations, Equality and Diversity policy.
(AQW 6178/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Since the policy was launched in March 2011 good progress has been made and implementation of the new policy commenced in September 2011. The focus has been on progressing enabling actions, including development of guidance and an indicator framework which can be used to baseline and assess progress. The guidance and indicator framework have now been agreed and are expected to launch imminently.

A dedicated website (www.CREDNI.org) has been launched to support implementation of the policy and disseminate good practice. Education & Library Boards (ELBs) are leading on the development of a regional training strategy to ensure educators have the skills and experience to deliver curricular requirements relating to community relations, equality and diversity (CRED) and skills training is expected to get underway in 2012/13. In addition, ELBs are currently undertaking awareness sessions on the policy with schools and youth organisations.

ELBs have completed the application and award stages of CRED Enhancement Scheme, which provides funding to assist in delivery of relevant programmes within schools and youth organisations. Projects involving meaningful contact between young people, from a diverse range of backgrounds, including on a cross community basis, have commenced.

A joint Youth and Schools Interboard Panel, which reports to the Senior Education Officers Group, has been established by the Education and Library Boards to oversee implementation of the policy.

Transfer Tests

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to outline the legal implications for a school if it prepares P7 pupils for transfer tests, whilst neglecting the educational needs of other P7 pupils who are not taking transfer tests.
(AQW 6203/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education's guidance on post-primary transfer, published on 5 July 2010, was issued under Article 16B of the 1997 Education Order as amended by Article 30 of the 2006 Education Order. This legislation places a statutory duty on schools to "have regard to" guidance issued under it. The guidance on post-primary transfer recommends "that primary schools do not prepare their children for unregulated entrance tests". The first legal implication for a school which does not follow the guidance is that it is required to be able to demonstrate how it has had regard to the guidance.

Secondly, schools have statutory obligations to deliver the primary curriculum as defined in Articles 4-9 of the 2006 Education Order. Measures exist to enforce these obligations including Curriculum Complaints Tribunals which can require schools to take steps to fulfil their obligations.

Department for Employment and Learning

Certificate of Religious Education

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 5393/11-15, why students from Stranmillis University College, Belfast, who wish to sit the Catholic Certificate of Religious Education cannot avail of this at St Mary's University College, Belfast, instead of distance learning from Glasgow University.
(AQW 6104/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): I understand that the Certificate of Religious Education is taught as an integral part of the Bachelor of Education and Post Graduate Certificate of Education courses at St. Mary's University College. As such it is not currently possible to accommodate students from other institutions although delivery of the Certificate of Religious Education will be examined as part of the forthcoming review of the teacher training landscape which I announced in November 2011.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Bed and Breakfast and Guest House Accommodation

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what assistance is available for anyone seeking to establish luxury bed and breakfast and guest house accommodation, particularly in tourist areas.
(AQW 5677/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Financial support for guesthouses is targeted at developments on brown field sites in traditional seaside towns and for high quality "country house type" accommodation in existing habitable properties.

Useful information packs providing start up guidance for new B&B and guesthouses are available on www.nitb.com. The site also provides a wealth of other information including market intelligence, publications, master classes and seminars.

Potential accommodation providers will also find much useful business information on the Invest NI sponsored www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk site.

While support may be available for the establishment of a guesthouse, Invest NI does not provide financial support for new start B&B businesses.

Invest NI support policy reflects Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) view of market trends and visitor preferences.

NITB has commissioned Oxford Economics to model future need for tourist accommodation, aligned to future demand and the Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020. This work is underway and may potentially lead to a change in intervention policy.

In addition, under the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's Rural Development Programme funding cannot be offered to create new bed and breakfast guesthouse establishments or additional bed spaces within an existing bed and breakfast guesthouse facility. Assistance can be offered to help the bed and breakfast provider improve the guesthouse facilities, for example adding en suite facilities to existing bedrooms, adding a separate dining area and in some areas depending on the type of visitor utilising the facility storage and drying area for outdoor pursuits and wet weather equipment.

The Axis 3 measures, of the NI Rural Development Programme 2007-2013, are delivered by seven Joint Council Committees working in partnership with their appointed Local Action Group. The Londonderry East area covers the operational area of two Joint Council Committees. North East (NER) Joint Council Committee is responsible for implementing the Axis 3 measures is the Coleraine area. Andrew McAlister, NER rural development manager can be contacted at Ecos Centre, Millinium Environmental Centre, Kernohan's Lane, Broughshane Road, Ballymena, BT43 7QA; telephone 028 2563 8263; or email northeast.rdp@ballymena.gov.uk. ARC North West Joint Council Committee is responsible for implementing the Axis 3 measures is the Limavady area. Claudine McGuigan, ARC rural development manager can be contacted at the Omagh District Council Offices, The Grange, Mountjoy Road, Omagh, BT79 7BL; telephone 028 8225 0202 or email claudine.mcguigan@omagh.gov.uk.

Bankruptcy

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of bankruptcy cases in each year since 2005, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 6158/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The table below shows the number of people declared bankrupt broken down by constituency and financial year since 14 October 2006 to the present (10 January 2012)

	Financial Year					
Constituency	**06/07(1)**	**07/08**	**08/09**	**09/10**	**10/11**	**11/12(2)**
Belfast East	23	43	60	69	76	43
Belfast North	40	42	56	65	49	53
Belfast South	41	52	74	64	74	65
Belfast West	29	70	63	59	68	61
East Antrim	46	39	50	56	71	36
East Londonderry	23	50	49	71	73	75
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	35	40	55	70	83	78
Foyle	56	46	89	84	107	71
Lagan Valley	45	46	54	69	82	71
Mid Ulster	47	49	74	63	62	59

Constituency	Financial Year					
	06/07(1)	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12(2)
Newry & Armagh	45	56	53	74	86	75
North Antrim	35	50	56	70	82	47
North Down	51	60	62	74	91	75
South Antrim	31	37	47	43	58	63
South Down	42	73	78	69	94	87
Strangford	44	33	62	59	77	53
Upper Bann	39	58	55	66	69	48
West Tyrone	37	33	62	64	88	62
Unknown(3)	40	29	56	61	66	42
Total Number of Bankruptcies	**749**	**906**	**1155**	**1250**	**1456**	**1164**
Percentage of available data	**95%**	**97%**	**95%**	**95%**	**95%**	**96%**

(1) The constituency breakdown of bankruptcies is only available from 14 October 2006. To obtain this information prior to 14 October 2006, would necessitate examination of each individual case file, the cost of which would be disproportionate.

(2) 2011/2012 bankruptcies up to 10 January 2012.

(3) The number of bankruptcies where postcode data was unavailable

Department of the Environment

Fly-posting

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his Department's programme to introduce regulations to implement the new provisions on fly-posting included in the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.
(AQW 103/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (NI) 2011 is a detailed and complex Act covering a wide range of local environmental quality issues. A significant body of subordinate legislation, guidance and Code of Practice documents is necessary to support the implementation of the Act and to help district councils to get the most out of the new powers they will have under the Act.

In accordance with a commitment given to the Environment Committee by the Department during the Committee Stage of the Bill, a series of public consultation exercises is being carried out on the various measures in the Act. A consultation exercise on draft statutory guidance on Defacement Removal Notices to help combat graffiti and fly-posting is currently underway and is due to end on 16 February 2012.

In response to a request made by a number of councils during the consultation exercise on the draft Bill, it is proposed, as was the case in England and Wales with the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005, to provide for a one year lead in time to April 2012. This timeline reflects the heavy workload necessary for full implementation of the Act but more importantly, however, will allow councils sufficient time to consider the implications of the new powers, make the necessary changes to working practices and arrange staff training.

To take account of the concerns expressed by councils that they would be overwhelmed by all of the consultation exercises being carried out concurrently, the issuing of the consultation documents has been staggered throughout 2011. This has enabled the substantial volume of work involved to be managed effectively and allowed councils and the Environment Committee adequate time to consider the content of each consultation document.

Planning Applications: Ministerial Interventions

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of Ministerial interventions in relation to planning applications in each of the last 12 months.
(AQW 362/11-15)

Mr Attwood: While the majority of planning decisions are delegated to officials, the Minister can intervene in individual cases if he considers it appropriate. While the Department's electronic data storage and retrieval system for planning applications can provide data on a number of topics (for example applications refused per council district), I have to advise that the Department

did not have a system to record separately the number of times a Minister intervened in individual planning applications over the period referred to before.

I have instructed the Permanent Secretary to put in place a system whereby a record is kept of the number of items of correspondence on planning issues received, the number of requests for meetings, the number of meetings, the date/time/place/attendees of meetings, the taking of and retention of a note of the meeting, details of any Ministerial decisions/follow up action etc. This should constitute good process and accountability.

Ministerial interventions in planning issues are most frequently prompted by issues raised by elected representatives, applicants or objectors to particular applications, or by members of the public. The number of such cases raised with the Minister through correspondence or requests for meetings on planning issues therefore provides some indication of the overall numbers of interventions (although the receipt of a letter or meeting request will not always prompt an intervention). The figures below provide this information for the twelve month period prior to the date of the Question.

Month	**Number of items of correspondence on planning issues**	**Number of meeting requests / invitations received on planning issues**
June 2010	21	15
July 2010	21	19
August 2010	28	15
September 2010	51	25
October 2010	26	11
November 2010	26	29
December 2010	26	16
January 2011	21	14
February 2011	29	15
March 2011	37	12
April 2011	16	6
May 2011	37	27
Total	**339**	**204**

Therefore for the period June 2010 to May 2011 the Minister's office received 339 pieces of correspondence and 204 meeting / invitation requests in respect of planning matters. Finally I would point out that the above data would not include any case where an intervention was initiated by the Minister of the Environment without a prior letter/invitation.

MOT Tests: Proposed Changes

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the financial impact of the proposed changes to MOT tests on small automobile repair shops.
(AQW 4551/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The proposed changes to MOT tests should have a negligible impact on small automobile repair shops. While the MOT test changes include checks of malfunction indicator lights, many repair shops already have the diagnostic equipment and systems required to ensure that they can deal with auto-electronic system failures or already have access to such equipment at other locations. Many of the other tests are developments and the wider application of a number of existing tests which should cause limited new expense or demands on existing mechanics.

Protected Species

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment how much his Department has spent on protecting (i) bats; (ii) otters; and (iii) other protected species in each of the last five years.
(AQW 4591/11-15)

Mr Attwood: It is not possible to separate out the total resources allocated to protected species from all natural heritage activities carried out within the Department. The following activities all contribute to the conservation of protected species:

(i) responding to planning consultations;

(ii) monitoring and managing designated sites;

(iii) undertaking research and surveys;

(iv) grant aiding the activities of NGOs;

(v) controlling pollution in rivers, lakes and seas; and

(vi) development of new legislation and policy.

However, the table below provides details of the funding that can be identified as attributable to specific projects associated with the protection of species.

Financial Year	Projects Funded by NIEA on Bats	Projects Funded by NIEA on Otters	Projects Funded by NIEA on Other Protected Species
2006-07	£15,000	-	£392,000
2007-08	£25,350	-	£559,500
2008-09	£15,000	-	£515,500
2009-10	£37,000	-	£494,400
2010-11	£23,600	£37,900	£404,950
Total	**£115,950**	**£37,900**	**£2,366,350**

The following table provides a breakdown of the £2.3m for projects funded by NIEA on protected species other than bats and otters.

Financial Year	Funding provided to Centre for Environmental Data and Recording (CEDaR)	Funding provided under the Natural Heritage Research Partnership Contract (NHRP)	Other Projects	Total Estimated Resource Funding by NIEA on "Other" Protected Species
2006-07	£112,000	£245,000	£35,000	£392,000
2007-08	£119,000	£196,000	£244,500	£559,500
2008-09	£119,000	£175,000	£221,500	£515,500
2009-10	£112,000	£245,000	£137,400	£494,400
2010-11	£112,000	£175,000	£117,950	£404,950
Total	**£574,000**	**£1,036,000**	**£756,350**	**£2,366,350**

" Other projects" represents NIEA's expenditure on a range of other projects in relation to protected species.

The above figures exclude staff costs but represent an estimate of actual contract costs on protecting protected species in each of the last five years. The range of projects is large and can include, for example, inventory and basic survey work, monitoring of species abundance and research into conservation requirements for particular species.

I have asked for more information into the costs of work undertaken and its necessity.

Planning Application: Gas Storage Facility in Antrim

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the planning process for the gas storage facility in Antrim. **(AQW 4886/11-15)**

Mr Attwood: Further environmental information was requested by the Department on 26 August 2011. The requested further information relates to: water management issues and pollution prevention, archaeology and the results of a marine geophysical survey, detail on the chemical and mechanical properties of the salt bed, bird survey information, assessment of trees and vegetation to be removed, effect of wave action on above ground facilities, roads details, noise and dust information and fisheries information.

The date for submission of the information is 25 November 2011; however, an extension of time has been agreed following a request from the agent, until Friday 4 May 2012. The extension of time was necessary to allow winter bird survey information to be gathered.

I believe that his application requires rigorous assessment against economic potential, environmental need and other criteria.

Water Framework Directive

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment what progress has been made on meeting the EU targets for Good Ecological Status for all freshwater bodies; and whether the targets will be met by 2015.
(AQW 5027/11-15)

Mr Attwood: River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) for Northern Ireland were published in December 2009 to meet one of the key requirements of the Water Framework Directive.

The RBMPs state that around 20% of the 575 river water bodies and 27% of 22 lake water bodies at 50 hectares or greater) are at good status and through the measures in the plans the aim is to reach around 56% of rivers and 32 % of lakes at good status by 2015.

The implementation of the RBMPs to meet the targets to achieve good ecological status is being taken forward through the development and implementation of 26 Local Management Area (LMA) action plans over a three year rolling programme from 2010/11 to 2012/13.

The first 9 of the 26 local action plans were produced in March 2011 and these are currently being implemented. The next set of nine are due to be completed by March 2012. Implementation actions include additional targeted biological monitoring, awareness raising, targeted river walks to identify individual pollution hotspots and inspections of premises with the potential to cause water pollution.

There is a key reporting milestone at the end of 2012, when the Department must report to the EU Commission on progress in taking forward the implementation of the measures set out in the RBMPs. This will provide a further indication on the position regarding the achievement of the 2015 targets. I have to say that a funding bid of £8.9 million has not succeeded to date. I am looking at funding for this work as part of the business planning process.

Septic Tanks

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the specification for septic tanks; and the change in these specifications since 1908.
(AQW 5405/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The underground septic tank system is believed to have originated in France on or around the year 1860. By the mid 1880's, two-chamber, automatic siphoning septic tank systems, similar in concept to those used today, were being installed in the United States of America before being used in English properties in the late 1800's.

A British Standard for septic tanks did not appear until 1956 in the form of Code of Practice CP 302.100 Small Domestic Sewage Treatment Works. A septic tank was regarded as a "cesspool" within the definitions of the Public Health Act 1936, which was in force at that time.

In the early 1970's, the 1956 Code of Practice was revised to become CP 302:1972. In 1983 the British Standard BS 6297:1983 Design and Installation of Small Sewage Treatment Works and Cesspools was adopted.

BS 6297 was revised in 2007, and amended in 2008. This document, along with the European Standard EN 12566- Small Wastewater Treatment Systems contains the most current detailed specification on the design of septic tank systems.

As the content of this is too detailed to include in this response, I have asked my officials in the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to send you a copy of BS 6297 for your information. This includes detail on the physical design of both the tank and sub-surface irrigation system, the hydraulic capacity and structural integrity of the tank, access requirements for maintenance and inspection, and quality of construction materials.

Planning Applications: Article 31 Determinations

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how many Article 31 Determinations are currently awaiting a decision from his Department.
(AQW 5426/11-15)

Mr Attwood: 54 Article 31 applications are currently awaiting decision from the Department. This figure includes 3 applications awaiting an appeal hearing against Notice of Opinions to refuse, 5 applications awaiting a public inquiry and 2 applications are the subject of judicial review.

Planning officials in the Strategic Planning Division are currently progressing a number of Article 31 applications on which a report and recommendation will be made to me in the near future. I meet with senior officials once a month to review Article 31 and to help ensure decisions are made when good evidence and process prevails. In addition, with a new leadership team in the Planning Service, Article 31 applications are subject to more rigorous assessment with the intention of bringing recommendations forward more expeditiously.

Planning Applications: Article 31 Determinations

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the average length of time taken to process an Article 31 Planning Determination I (i) 2008, (ii) 2009, (iii) 2010.
(AQW 5427/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The average length of time taken to process an Article 31 application is available on a financial year basis and detailed below:

- 26 decisions issued for the period 1 April 2008 – 31 March 2009. The average processing time was 69 months.
- 10 decisions issued for the period 1 April 2009 – 31 March 2010. The average processing time was 21 months.
- 27 decisions issued for the period 1 April 2010 – 31 March 2011. The average processing time was 34 months.

It is worth noting that when the 2 Strategic Project teams which process the majority of Article 31 applications were established in late 2007 they were required to complete the processing of a number of Article 31 applications already in the system. A number were longstanding due to outstanding environmental information despite repeated requests by Planning to obtain the necessary information on order to properly assess the application. In early 2008 the then Minister of the Environment directed that all such applications should be refused.

Planning Applications: Article 31 Determinations

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the average length of time taken to process an Article 31 Planning Determination since May 2011.
(AQW 5429/11-15)

Mr Attwood: 3 Article 31 applications have been processed to a decision since May 2011. The average length of time was 60 months. Due to due to a variety of reasons such as, a lack of sufficient information, delays with agents, the need for surveys and additional environmental information and at times issues within DOE Planning and NIEA, the applications took some time to process to a decision.

As outlined in AQ 5426/11-15, there is a more robust approach in place and being developed over the last six months, which will see the creation of better planning and greater confidence in the planning system.

DOE: Headquarters

Mr Kinahan asked the Mnister of the Environment whether his Department's office will be moving from Clarence Court; and if so, to detail (i) the rationale behind such a move; (ii) the proposed timescale and cost; and (iii) the options considered for the relocation.
(AQW 5510/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The DOE Private Office, Office of Permanent Secretary and DOE Press Office moved to join other DOE Staff in Goodwood House on 9 December 2011. Goodwood House conforms to Workplace NI objectives and standards, forms part of NICS Reform Proposals, creates a more modern, flexible, friendly work environment, helping to maximise performance of the Department and to do so with greater financial and wider efficiency. These were strong grounds for the move and the Minister fully agreed. I have been active in addressing internal Departmental costs. As one example, on appointment as DOE Minister, I suppressed one of three Deputy Permanent Secretary posts with a saving of over £100k.

In agreeing to move to Goodwood House, I insisted that costs were kept to a minimum. I refused to approve initial budget indications and insisted the move was carried at a low cost, such as no purchase of new furniture and any costs were for essential health and safety and IT/communication reasons. Consequently, these costs are estimated at around £2,500, the details of which are:

Detail	**Total £**
Electrical work for AV installation	1800
Builders Work in Connection to M&E	180
Telephone connection charges	446
Fax Machines connection charge	90
Total	**2516**

The move occurred also on a working day to reduce porterage charges (around £750), and there are some internal, interdepartmental charges (i.e. where no external contracts involved) which shall be confirmed shortly.

This information confirms that at a low cost, the interests of staff have been improved with a more favourable working environment to assist DOE delivery across its sustainability, renewable, planning and other functions.

Salmon Rivers

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment to list the salmon rivers that lie within Special Areas of Conservation.
(AQW 5610/11-15)

Mr Attwood: There are three rivers in Northern Ireland that have been designated as Special Areas of Conservation for their salmon populations:

- River Foyle and Tributaries
- River Roe and Tributaries
- River Faughan and Tributaries

Salmon Rivers

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the benefit of "Special Areas of Conservation" to salmon rivers, in protecting salmon and increasing the salmon population.
(AQW 5613/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Three salmon rivers in Northern Ireland have been designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) under the EC Habitats Directive. This Directive requires Member States to maintain or restore habitats and species to favourable conservation status.

SACs are afforded particular protection under the Conservation (Natural Habitats etc.) Regulations (NI) 1995. It is incumbent on Government Departments and Agencies in Northern Ireland to ensure the continued long term protection of the three salmon SACs in order to maintain the population at favourable conservation status as required by the Habitats Directive.

The management of salmon river SACs is a component of the wider management of salmon populations through the UK-NI Implementation Plan of the North Atlantic Salmon Convention. This requires proactive management in such areas as site protection and enhancement and the control of fishing. Management responsibilities lie with several Departments and Agencies, including DOE, DARD, DCAL and the Loughs Agency, but with DCAL having overall policy lead.

Salmon are listed in the Habitats Directive as a freshwater species and therefore cannot be protected when occupying a marine environment. The biggest threats to salmon populations are believed to be when they are at sea. NIEA are not aware of any specific local threats to the three river systems which would cause a deterioration in their salmon populations.

Through the Water Framework Directive, the SACs attract an additional level of protection delivered through River Basin Management Plans.

In conclusion, it is my assessment that the SAC designation contributes to the protection of salmon in the three river systems through a well co-ordinated management process.

Ballymena Area Plan

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of the European court case on Area Plans, when the new Ballymena Area Plan will recommence, given that the current plan is out of date.
(AQW 5615/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I can confirm that the European Court has been considering the legality of certain elements of the transposition into Northern Ireland law of the European Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive. In its judgement delivered on 20 October 2011 it found in favour of the Department's position in principle. The Department is now awaiting the Northern Ireland Court of Appeal to verify the European Court ruling in the specific circumstances of the original challenge to the Draft Northern and Magherafelt Area Plans. Accordingly, the Department is now seeking to expedite this matter, following which it will consider the implications with legal advisors.

If the outcome is as anticipated, the Department will review its Development Plan Programme throughout the Province and therefore is not currently in a position to advise when work will commence on the Area Plan for Ballymena Borough Council district.

Local Government: Reform

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of the Environment what action will be taken to ensure that the work that has already been undertaken by the Transition Committees will be utilised in the future Reform of Local Government.
(AQW 5631/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The work generally was important and a number of Transition Committees in particular were impressive. This is valuable work and experience to be utilised in the future.

In moving forward, the Department will be reviewing with Transition Committees, the work undertaken by them so far to ensure that it can feed into the revised implementation structures. It is my intention to restart their work in an appropriate format.

Recycling: Textile Bins

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of the Environment what measures govern the placement of textile recycling bins and the distribution of the items collected.
(AQW 5633/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Only used textiles that have not been donated for reuse are subject to waste management licensing requirements.

The placement of a textile recycling bank for used textiles defined as waste requires a waste management authorisation, issued by the Waste Management Licensing Section, NIEA. Under the Waste Management Licensing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 (as amended) there are some waste activities which are exempted from the requirement to have a licence.

Paragraph 18, Schedule 2, Part I of the Regulations may provide for an exemption, if the operator can meet all of the required criteria and limitations.

The distribution of the collected items is at the collectors discretion, however if the textiles are still deemed to be waste, all movements must comply with Duty of Care requirements and must be sent to an appropriately authorised site. Trans-frontier Shipment legislation will also apply in relation to the exportation of waste textiles.

With regards planning, while there is no specific legislation which deals with this issue, the placement of textile recycling bins may be addressed through Part 12 of Schedule 1 to the Planning (General Development) Order (Northern Ireland) 1993. Part 12 provides for permitted development rights for certain development undertaken by District Councils.

In the event that development is not permitted by virtue of Part 12 a planning application can be submitted for consideration. Any application regarding textile waste must be in compliance with Policy WM 1 'Environmental Impact of a Waste Management Facility' and Policy WM 2 'Waste Collection and Treatment Facilities' in Planning Policy Statement 11: Planning and Waste Management.

Shale Gas Extraction

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of (i) the findings of the University of Manchester Tyndall Centre report 'Shale gas: an updated assessment of environmental and climate change impacts'; and (ii) whether shale gas extraction is compatible with greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets.
(AQW 5643/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My officials have considered the University of Manchester Tyndall Centre 'Shale gas: an updated assessment of environmental and climate change impacts' report. The Tyndall Centre is an acknowledged authority on climate change and related environmental issues and hence this research is to be welcomed since it adds to the body of knowledge on this contentious issue. However, it should be noted that the authors themselves stress that one of the main findings of the report is that there is a paucity of information on which to base an analysis of what the environmental and health impacts of shale gas extraction might be and what the impact could be on greenhouse gas emissions.

That said the report does confirm significant concerns that have been in the public domain particularly in relation to the effects of extraction techniques on groundwater, water consumption, noise pollution and other environmental matters. The evidence presented in the report on greenhouse gas emissions is complex but I would be concerned that the report considers that shale gas has the potential to undermine efforts to decarbonise the economy through the development of renewable technologies. Another key concern is that the global extraction of shale gas, in the absence of legally binding cap on greenhouse gas emissions, could make dangerous climate change more likely.

Because of the public concerns being raised by reports like this I have already tasked my officials across the planning, environmental policy and regulatory fields to ensure that all environmental requirements that are appropriate and necessary for the extraction of shale gas are fulfilled.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is currently supplementing its knowledge of the fracking process with emerging research, by studying case studies from other parts of the world and by liaising with counterparts in other Environment Agencies in countries where fracking is currently proposed or taking place. Publication of the Tyndall Centre report broadens the information available on the process and will aid effective decision making should an application for planning permission or the required environmental permissions be received.

Overall publication of the report is timely and reinforces the need for everyone to remain vigilant in relation to the fracking and shale gas issue. Due to the issues emerging on this development, I am to ask for a meeting with the DETI Minister to convey DOE/NIEA views on the issue of fracking.

Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations (NI) 2003

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what plans there are to change the Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations (NI) 2003.
(AQW 5664/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department has no plans to amend the Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations (NI) 2003 in the near future. Officials are, however, developing a new Statutory Rule which, although not directly linked to the 2003 Regulations, will effectively complement them. The new Regulations will place a duty on drivers of scheduled bus services to assist disabled

people and wheelchair users, if required, whilst boarding and alighting from the bus. The new Regulations are expected to become operative in mid-2012.

Green Belt: Towerview, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment whether the green belt area behind the Towerview area of Bangor will remain as such under the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan proposals.
(AQW 5674/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 21 'Sustainable Development in the Countryside', published on 1 June 2010 sets out planning policies for development in the countryside. Countryside is defined as land lying outside of settlement limits as defined in development plans.

The area of countryside adjacent to the Towerview area of Bangor was proposed as green belt under Designation COU 1 of the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP). However, the policy provisions of PPS21 now take precedence over any green belt designations contained in existing and published draft development plans, and as a consequence the Department has withdrawn the proposed BMA Green Belt contained in Draft BMAP. The countryside adjacent to Towerview in Bangor is therefore no longer designated as green belt and is subject to the policies contained in PPS21.

Draft BMAP was published in November 2004, and it covers 6 District Council areas including North Down. Nearly 4,000 objections were received in respect of the Draft Plan and a public inquiry was convened by the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) to consider these objections. This inquiry commenced in April 2007 and finished in May 2008.

A number of representations were received that related to the settlement limit for Bangor, including the part of the limit adjacent to the Towerview area. These objections relate to the non-inclusion of land within the settlement limit.

The Department received the PAC Report into objections relating to North Down Borough in September 2011 but is still awaiting the PAC Report on two remaining district council areas. The Department is currently considering the PAC recommendations and preparing the Plan for adoption. I am therefore unable to confirm the future status of land in the countryside adjacent to Towerview, Bangor until BMAP is adopted.

Northern Ireland Environment Agency: Fines

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the total revenue generated from fines imposed by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency in each of the last five years.
(AQW 5687/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) undertakes a range of regulatory and enforcement activities which can in certain cases result in prosecutions being taken by the Department against offenders. Successful prosecutions initiated by NIEA against polluters may result in punitive fines but these are determined and retained by the courts.

The table below provides details of the fines levied by and retained by the courts in each of the last five years.

Fines Imposed by Courts	**£**
2006	379,750
2007	324,750
2008	276,250
2009	254,050
2010	104,450
Total	**1,339,250**

A37, Broad Road: Human Waste Sludge Site

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of his recent announcement of a strategic partnership between the PSNI and the Environment Agency to tackle environmental and heritage crime, how his Department will ensure that the A37 Broad Road human waste sludge site complies with the site specific working plan when it re-opens after the compulsory closure period.
(AQW 5727/11-15)

Mr Attwood: NIEA is the regulating authority for waste management licences, including mobile treatment licences. The Agency would routinely monitor the site at Broad Road, Limavady, to ensure compliance with licensing conditions and the Site Specific Working Plan.

The site still has an extant waste licence, however it has not been operational since 13 October 2011, as sludge is being taken to Belfast for incineration.

NIEA has become aware upon receipt of site operator returns that the company has, on a number of occasions, received and treated more than the permitted 250 tonnes of sludge per day. The Agency had previously warned the company about breaching this condition and advised them that further breaches could result in the suspension or revocation of their licence. NIEA has decided to revoke the mobile treatment licence for the site. The Revocation Notice issued on 7 December 2011 and will come into effect on 4 January 2012.

After this date there will be no waste licence or Site Specific Working Plan for this waste facility and any waste activities undertaken would be considered as illegal and liable to enforcement action. I have asked for a two-weekly report on any developments.

This operator or another business may wish to submit an application to operate a waste facility at this site after the 4 January 2012, in which case NIEA will process the submission taking into account all documentation and information received. However, I wish to make it fully clear that I will be robust in ensuring that decisions on licences are proper, taking into account all factors.

The strategic partnership between the PSNI and NIEA which was launched last week is designed to look at new and emerging crime trends and not individual regulatory cases. The Environmental Crime Unit in NIEA will review each potential referral on a case by case basis against a number of parameters, but I am determined that, where appropriate, action will be taken.

Local Economic and Urban Regeneration

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the extent to which community planning legislation could be used by councils to improve local economic and urban regeneration.
(AQW 5858/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Reform of local government will give councils a major responsibility for the future economic and social development of their areas. Councils will engage their local communities (including business people and investors) to draw up Community Plans and spatial Development Plans showing how their areas should change in the future and they will be responsible for the implementation of those plans.

The proposed legislative framework to support community planning will not be highly prescriptive about how it should be carried out within individual council areas, recognising that the appropriate approach and balance of individual partnerships will depend on local circumstances. However, DOE will seek how best to influence, inform and require Councils to work positively on this issue.

The proposed community planning legislative framework and community planning process will provide an opportunity to identify issues such as economic development and regeneration as priorities within agreed Community Plans to be taken forward within the Strategic Community Planning Partnerships.

Evidence from other jurisdictions prove this is a very important power, one that need to be used wisely as plan-led development is good development.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Civil Servants from the Foyle Constituency who Work in Greater Belfast

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the total number of civil servants who live in the Foyle constituency and travel to work in the Greater Belfast area; and the total cost to his Department for subsidising the travel.
(AQW 5621/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The total number of civil servants in the NICS who live in the Foyle constituency and travel to work in the Greater Belfast area is 98. During the period January – 30 November 2011 the total cost for subsidising travel in my Department was £9,170.00

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Foster Care: Promotion

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to 4207/11-15, what publications the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust used to promote foster care in (i) 2010; and (ii) 2011 to date.
(AQW 5557/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): My reply to AQW 4207/11-15 refers.

I am aware that an individual used the Trust logo without permission to advertise a Trust fostering information session. Action has now been taken to ensure this will not happen again.

Sensory Support Service: Western Health and Social Care Trust

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of staff in the Sensory Support Team in the Western Health and Social Care Trust; (ii) the total budget for Sensory Support Services in the Trust in each

of the last three years; and (iii) whether the Trust has informed the Department that any staff within the Sensory Support Team will (a) be offered voluntary redundancy; (b) be made redundant; or (c) have their contracted hours reduced and, if so, to give the reason for the reduction.
(AQW 5912/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are currently 14 (13.2 Whole Time Equivalent) staff employed by the Western Health and Social Care Trust to directly deliver Sensory Support services, divided between two teams:

(i) one based in Londonderry, the other based in Enniskillen. This includes one current vacancy.

(ii) The WHSCT Salaries and Wages budget for the Sensory Support Service over the last three years was as follows:

Year	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Salaries and Wages Budget	507,000	465,000	459,000

The WHSCT also provides sensory equipment at costs in excess of £80,000 per annum. Voluntary sector contract values in total exceed £120,000 per annum whilst sign language interpreting costs are around £40,000 per annum. In addition, activity in housing support and respite services totals around £40,000 and specialist residential care for service users with sensory needs costs around £100,000 per annum.

(iii) The WHSCT currently has no plans to offer voluntary or compulsory redundancy to any staff in the Sensory Support Team, nor are there plans to reduce their hours.

Pregnancy: Guidance on Termination

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 1943/11-15, for an update on when the Guidance on the Termination of Pregnancy will be published.
(AQW 5978/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have directed my Department to reconsider the revised Guidance.

It is not possible to confirm when guidance will be issued.

Children and Young People: Integrated Services

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what work his Department has carried out, in conjunction with the Department of Education, in relation to the provision of integrated services for children and young people.
(AQW 5981/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has worked closely and collaboratively with the Department of Education (DE) on a range of projects to either develop services provided directly to children and young people or services aimed at providing greater protections for them. Both departments have worked jointly to develop services in schools to: improve access to dental services either by providing them directly on school site or on a mobile basis; increase accessibility to the services of doctors, nurses (including nurses specialising in diabetes, behaviour support, epilepsy and child and adolesesent mental health), counsellors, speech and language therapists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, heath visitors and community paediatricians. Both departments have worked collaboratively to improve the health and educational outcomes of specific groups of children, for example: children with a range of conditions and complex care needs, including children with a physical and learning disbility, children with asthma, children with autism, those with challenging behaviours and pupils with specific medication needs. Under the auspices of the Care Matters Strategy, both departments have worked together to seek to improve the educational outcomes of children in the care system with a new system of personal education planning introduced with the support of both departments in December 2011. Finally, my department has received the full cooperation of DE to establish new vetting and barring arrangements aimed at strengthening safeguards for children in a wide range of workplace situations.

South Tyrone Hospital: Major Injuries Unit

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of (i) the proposed reduction in the opening hours of South Tyrone Hospital's Major Injuries Unit; and (ii) the distance to the nearest Unit during closed hours.
(AQW 6009/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) The provision of the minor injuries service at South Tyrone Hospital is an operational matter for the Southern Health and Social Care Trust. The Southern Trust is currently consulting on proposals for all the minor injuries units (MIUs) in its area, including South Tyrone MIU, and it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the Trust's proposals while that process is ongoing.

(ii) When the South Tyrone Hospital MIU is closed, the nearest available MIU is Mullinure MIU in Armagh, 13 miles away. Other options for patients requiring urgent medical assistance outside the South Tyrone MIU opening hours include contacting the GP Out of Hours service located at South Tyrone Hospital or attending the emergency department at Craigavon Area Hospital, 19 miles from South Tyrone Hospital.

Minister of Health: Meetings with Health and Social Care Trusts

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the number of meetings he has held in the last 12 months with the (i) Northern Health and Social Care Trust; (ii) the Western Health and Social Care Trust; and (iii) Southern Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 6011/11-15)

Mr Poots: Since coming to office in May 2011, I have made multiple visits and met with representatives of all Trust's. I have also met collectively with the Chairs and Chief Executives of all Trusts on two separate occasions. I have also attended the Western Trust Special Recognition Awards Ceremony and the Southern Trust Excellence Awards Ceremony.

Fuel Allowance Payment for People Receiving Treatment for Cancer

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the criteria used to determine eligibility for the £100 one-off cold weather payment for people receiving treatment for cancer; and (ii) how people with cancer can apply for this payment; and (iii) how much money has been allocated for these payments.
(AQW 6021/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) The eligibility criteria for the £100 one-off fuel allowance payment are patients who have received surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy or palliative care for cancer within six months prior to and including the qualifying week, which is 12th to 18th December 2011. Also, patients for whom a decision to treat has been made but treatment in the form of surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy or palliative care has not yet commenced during the qualifying week.

(ii) No application is necessary. All cancer patients who are eligible to receive the Fuel Allowance Initiative will be identified and contacted on an individual basis. My officials are currently liaising with Health and Social Care Board and the Business Services Organisation on the arrangements necessary to enable this payment to be made to eligible patients by 29 February 2012.

(iii) In accordance with the guidance for Departments to access the Social Protection Fund (from which these payments are being made), my Department registered its funding requirement in the January Monitoring Round amounting to £800,000.

Fast Food Restaurants Beside Schools

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of (i) whether the development of fast food restaurants beside schools is compatible with the aim of the Compton Review to promote heath; and (ii) whether he would support a change to planning legislation which would ban such developments.
(AQW 6093/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) To help empower children to make healthier choices within the school environment my Department has been working closely with the Department of Education on the development of a Food in Schools Policy, which ensures that healthy food options are available in all schools.

The Framework for Preventing Overweight and Obesity in Northern Ireland 2012-2022: A Fitter Future for All has recently been agreed by the Executive for implementation. This Framework includes a number of outcomes for both food and nutrition and for physical activity that aim to improve the health and wellbeing of the population across the life-course.

In particular the Framework includes an outcome that any reviews of planning policies take account of the impact of planning on health including opportunities for sustainable physical activity. My Department will continue to promote the benefits of implementing Health Impact Assessments on all new or developing planning policies.

(ii) I would be broadly supportive of any change to planning legislation if it would have a positive impact on the health of the population of Northern Ireland. I have also been advised that the Department of Education has recently raised the issue of fast food outlets near schools with the Department of the Environment and will be following up on this in more detail.

IVF Treatment

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to enable couples in need of IVF treatment to access two complete cycles of treatment through the Health Service.
(AQW 6135/11-15)

Mr Poots: Northern Ireland aspires to provide the full three cycles of fertility treatment as recommended by NICE however financial constraints currently make this unachievable. I am aware that in some areas of the UK the number of cycles available is increasing. It is however worth noting that in many of these areas the NHS criteria for treatment are much more restrictive than we apply in Northern Ireland and therefore fewer couples have the opportunity to receive any publicly funded treatment.

Currently in Northern Ireland, we provide one fresh cycle of fertility treatment to those who meet the criteria. It is hoped that once the waiting list is stabilised, we will be able to progress to the provision of Frozen Embryo Transfer (FET). To provide three full cycles of treatment to each patient on the current resource level would reduce the number of women who can avail of the treatment.

Any expansion of the service will be dependent on future recurrent funding availability and would need to be on a planned basis to ensure waiting lists are maintained at current levels.

PIP Breast Implants

Mr Agnew asked Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many women currently have PIP breast implants; and whether the Health Service will facilitate women who wish to have them removed.

(AQW 6141/11-15)

Mr Poots: Investigations here to date indicate that no woman who has had her surgery in Northern Ireland either in the HSC or in the private sector has received PIP implants.

We are working closely with the independent sector to identify local women who may have received these implants outside Northern Ireland. While this work is ongoing at the moment, we understand this number to be very small.

When responses have been received from the independent sector we will examine the implications locally, including the potential impact on the HSC.

DHSSPS: Quangos

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many quangos are currently operating under his Department.
(AQW 6236/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has 17 Arms Length Bodies which are:

- Belfast Health and Social Care Trust;
- Southern Health and Social Care Trust;
- South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust;
- Western Health and Social Care Trust;
- Northern Health and Social Care Trust;
- NI Ambulance Service Trust;
- The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) ;
- The Public Health Agency (PHA);
- The Business Services Organization (BSO);
- The Patient and Client Council (PCC);
- NI Blood Transfusion Service (NIBTS);
- NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency (NIGALA);
- NI Medical & Dental Training Agency (NIMDTA);
- NI Social Care Council (NISCC);
- NI Practice & Education Council for Nursing & Midwifery (NIPEC);
- Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA); and,
- NI Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS)

Department of Justice

Bangor Courthouse: Staff

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many staff currently work at Bangor Courthouse.
(AQW 6118/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): No members of Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service staff are permanently based in Bangor Courthouse. Newtownards Courthouse staff provide administrative services at Bangor Courthouse on court hearing days.

A total of 24 staff currently work at Newtownards Courthouse.

In relation to the numbers of court cases heard, I would refer the Member to the reply I gave Mr Peter Weir on 30 December 2011 (AQW5782/11-15) detailing the number of cases processed.

Newtownards Courthouse: Staff

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many staff currently work at Newtownards Courthouse.
(AQW 6119/11-15)

Mr Ford: No members of Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service staff are permanently based in Bangor Courthouse. Newtownards Courthouse staff provide administrative services at Bangor Courthouse on court hearing days.

A total of 24 staff currently work at Newtownards Courthouse.

In relation to the numbers of court cases heard, I would refer the Member to the reply I gave Mr Peter Weir on 30 December 2011 (AQW5782/11-15) detailing the number of cases processed.

Bangor Courthouse: Cases

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many court cases have been heard at Bangor Courthouse in each of the last two years.
(AQW 6120/11-15)

Mr Ford: No members of Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service staff are permanently based in Bangor Courthouse. Newtownards Courthouse staff provide administrative services at Bangor Courthouse on court hearing days.

A total of 24 staff currently work at Newtownards Courthouse.

In relation to the numbers of court cases heard, I would refer the Member to the reply I gave Mr Peter Weir on 30 December 2011 (AQW5782/11-15) detailing the number of cases processed.

Newtownards Courthouse: Cases

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many court cases have been heard at Newtownards Courthouse in each of the last two years.
(AQW 6121/11-15)

Mr Ford: No members of Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service staff are permanently based in Bangor Courthouse. Newtownards Courthouse staff provide administrative services at Bangor Courthouse on court hearing days.

A total of 24 staff currently work at Newtownards Courthouse.

In relation to the numbers of court cases heard, I would refer the Member to the reply I gave Mr Peter Weir on 30 December 2011 (AQW5782/11-15) detailing the number of cases processed.

DOJ: Information Management

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Justice what procedures are in place to hold his Department, and it's arm's-length bodies, to account for any miscommunication of information in any form.
(AQW 6168/11-15)

Mr Ford: In line with other NICS Departments, there are documented procedures in place to ensure the Department is held to account should miscommunication of information take place.

If it becomes evident that any information issued by the Department or ALBs is incorrect, a correction is issued as a matter of urgency. The Department and its Arms Length Bodies (ALBs) have formal complaints procedures which can be used by anyone who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the Department's service.

In addition, the Department is subject to oversight and scrutiny by the Assembly and Justice Committee.

Robert Black

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 3975/11-15, whether the figure provided for the cost of chartering the plane was for a one-way journey.
(AQW 6184/11-15)

Mr Ford: The figure provided in AQW/3975/11 was for a one-way journey.

Department for Social Development

Social Housing: Economy 7 Heating

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the percentage of social housing with Economy 7 heating in each of the last ten years, broken down by council area.
(AQW 5718/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The Housing Executive cannot provide the information in the format requested as it does not routinely collate this information. However, the Housing Executive has reduced the number of homes with electrical heating systems from a peak of 26,000 to the current level of 9,390. Table 1 below details the current percentage of stock by their District Office area. The percentage of social housing stock as detailed by Housing Associations with Economy 7 heating broken down by council area is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 1: Housing Executive Stock with Electrical Heating Systems

District	% of stock
East Belfast	13.3
North Belfast	13.2
Shankill	7.5
South Belfast	8.7

District	% of stock
West Belfast	9.0
Antrim	5.7
Ballycastle	1.2
Ballymena	15.6
Ballymoney	5.5
Carrickfergus	6.1
Coleraine	16.6
Larne	16.7
Newtownabbey 1	18.4
Newtownabbey 2	9.2
Armagh	9.2
Banbridge	4.7
Dungannon	4.3
Fermanagh	5.0
Lurgan	18.6
Newry	7.3
Portadown	13.8
Bangor	16.0
Castlereagh	26.4
Downpatrick	13.3
Lisburn Antrim	12.4
Lisburn Dairyfarm	0.9
Newtownards	9.3
Collon Terrace	10.9
Cookstown	3.4
Limavady	7.1
Magherafelt	3.5
Omagh	4.0
Strabane	0.8
Waterloo Place	5.4
Waterside	5.7

Table 2: Percentage of Housing Association stock with Economy 7 Heating

District Council	2001 /02	2002 /03	2003 /04	2004 /05	2005 /06	2006 /07	2007 /08	2008 /09	2009 /10	2010 /11
Antrim	46%	46%	41%	35%	41%	39%	34%	30%	30%	23%
Ards	64%	64%	65%	65%	50%	56%	48%	46%	40%	36%
Armagh	44%	37%	36%	33%	33%	33%	31%	31%	28%	29%
Ballymena	25%	25%	24%	24%	24%	22%	22%	24%	24%	25%

District Council	2001 /02	2002 /03	2003 /04	2004 /05	2005 /06	2006 /07	2007 /08	2008 /09	2009 /10	2010 /11
Ballymoney	35%	33%	30%	35%	30%	35%	29%	29%	27%	26%
Banbridge	24%	24%	24%	24%	24%	21%	17%	17%	12%	13%
Belfast	39%	37%	35%	31%	27%	24%	21%	20%	17%	15%
Carrickfergus	34%	34%	31%	30%	28%	21%	19%	19%	19%	17%
Castlereagh	60%	55%	54%	49%	49%	34%	26%	21%	19%	19%
Coleraine	32%	32%	31%	29%	21%	19%	19%	20%	19%	18%
Cookstown	32%	32%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	0%
Craigavon	31%	31%	31%	30%	30%	29%	26%	23%	22%	20%
Derry City	21%	20%	19%	19%	19%	18%	18%	17%	15%	13%
Down	36%	31%	33%	31%	30%	31%	29%	26%	26%	25%
Dungannon & South Tyrone	78%	78%	77%	53%	69%	69%	64%	40%	32%	26%
Fermanagh	21%	20%	20%	19%	19%	18%	12%	11%	11%	10%
Larne	65%	65%	64%	60%	56%	60%	60%	51%	42%	36%
Limavady	19%	10%	10%	10%	9%	9%	9%	9%	9%	1%
Lisburn	20%	20%	19%	22%	17%	16%	13%	12%	12%	11%
Magherafelt	50%	50%	49%	44%	39%	45%	45%	45%	43%	22%
Moyle	33%	37%	35%	25%	20%	25%	24%	23%	25%	23%
Newry & Mourne	38%	34%	33%	32%	28%	26%	24%	22%	20%	18%
Newtownabbey	55%	55%	52%	52%	49%	49%	44%	39%	37%	29%
North Down	37%	35%	35%	34%	27%	20%	19%	18%	17%	8%
Omagh	3%	3%	3%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Strabane	17%	16%	11%	13%	12%	13%	12%	11%	11%	11%

Social Housing: Economy 7 Heating

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development what action he is taking to reduce the use of Economy 7 heating in social housing.
(AQW 5719/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has already reduced the number of homes with an electrical heating system from 26,000 to the current level of 9,390. The Housing Executive has also advised that approximately 2,500 of their electrically heated Housing Executive properties are included in heating replacement schemes in 2011/12. The Housing Executive's heating policy is that gas heating remains the only option offered in areas where it is available. Where gas is not available other options such as oil or wood pellet boilers are considered. In properties where these options are not technically feasible, for example certain multi-storey blocks, tenants are offered a more energy efficient electrical heating system.

With regard to Housing Associations, their plans to replace Economy 7 heating vary, for example one Association has replaced all of its stock with alternative heating through the Cosy Homes Scheme while others plan to replace their existing heating systems over the next five to seven years with gas where it is available.

Pensions Act 2011

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development (i) for an update on the introduction of the Northern Ireland Pensions Bill; (ii) whether it will be possible to maintain exact parity of timing; and (iii) for his assessment of the delay in enacting legislation.
(AQW 5874/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

(i) Subject to Executive agreement, I propose to introduce a Pensions Bill in January 2012.

(ii) The corresponding Westminster enactment, the Pensions Act 2011, received Royal Assent on 3 November 2011. Some provisions of that Act came into force on Royal Assent; others come into force two months after Royal Assent. It will not, therefore, be possible to maintain exact parity of timing.

(iii) Section 1 of the Pensions Act 2011, which comes into force two months after Royal Assent, provides for changes to State Pension age and parity of timing is of particular concern. Although the changes will not commence until 2016, I believe that the period of notice is, in retirement planning terms, extremely short. Until the Northern Ireland Bill receives Royal Assent, women here cannot plan with certainty for their future retirement date and may consider themselves disadvantaged in comparison to women in Great Britain. The longer the delay in enacting this legislation, the greater the disadvantage women here will face. I believe we should do everything we can to avoid adding to the challenges the women affected by the change in pension age will face in adapting their retirement plans.

Pensions Act 2011

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of clause one of the Pensions Bill, which provides for changes to the state pension age, and the affect this will have on people.
(AQW 5876/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Westminster Pensions Bill received Royal Assent on 3rd November 2011. Section 1 of the Westminster Pensions Act 2011 accelerates the process of equalising pension age for men and women, and increases pension age to 66 by October 2020. This will have a knock-on effect on the age of entitlement to pension benefits such as State Pension Credit and the Winter Fuel Payment and various working age benefits. An analysis of the impact of these changes can be found at http://www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/pensions-reform/pensions-bill-2011/.

Subject to Executive approval, it is anticipated that a corresponding Northern Ireland Bill will be introduced in the Assembly in January 2012. My Department's assessment of the likely effects of the proposed Northern Ireland Pensions Bill was detailed in the Equality Impact Assessment issued for consultation between 3 August 2011 and 30 September 2011. The Completed Equality Impact Assessment is available at http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/consultations/archived-consultations

Incapacity Benefit: Migration to Employment Support Allowance

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development for an update of the migration of Incapacity Benefit to Employment Support Allowance.
(AQW 5878/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The reassessment of approximately 76,000 existing Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance and Income Support (paid on the grounds of incapacity) customers started in February 2011. As of 30 November less than 20% of those customers had commenced reassessment.

The Incapacity Benefit/Income Support reassessment team continues to make steady progress in meeting the needs of customers through the transition. Regular contact, by telephone, at key stages with customers going through reassessment is a feature of the arrangements that have been put in place to provide support and advice. This is proving to be very successful with a significant number of customers receiving ongoing support and advice following the initial notification.

To date Agency staff have dealt with 11,486 enquiries from customers who are being reassessed. They have contacted 8,658 customers by telephone to explain the process and the Customer Advice and Support team have assisted 1,190 customers following a disallowance decision.

My Department is also considering the second year Work Capability Assessment Review by Professor Harrington which makes a number of recommendations to further support customers.

Work Capability Assessment

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the work ATOS Healthcare has carried out in relation to the Work Capability Assessment.
(AQW 5880/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Atos Healthcare has been delivering the Medical Support Service on behalf of my Department since 20 June 2011. The commencement of this contract coincided with the ramp up of healthcare assessments relating to the Incapacity Benefit reassessment project as well as the delivery of assessments for Disability Living Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance. Atos Healthcare are committed to the contract with my Department and there are robust contractual mechanisms in place to monitor performance. During the first six months of the contract they have had to overcome a number of challenges, in particular the availability of suitably trained healthcare professionals and variations in the number of assessments to be undertaken. I have arrangements in place to ensure I am kept informed of the performance of Atos Healthcare and I will be receiving a six month briefing in January 2012.

Work Capability Assessment

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development (i) to detail the number of people who have completed a Work Capability Assessment; and (ii) for his assessment of the findings to date.
(AQW 5881/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

(i) The Work Capability Assessment was introduced in October 2008 to determine eligibility to Employment and Support Allowance. To date, 49,899 Work Capability Assessments have been completed.

(ii) The Work Capability Assessment was designed to be an evidence based process to review an individual's capacity for work, building on previous assessments of a similar nature. In the past we have allowed many of those with health conditions to be considered unable to work and have not given them the assistance they require to fulfil their potential and contribute to society. I now recognise the need to give people the support required to get them into, or return to employment. The Work Capability Assessment enables us to decide who can work and who needs support. As it is a new procedure, the relevant legislation specified the need for an independent review of its fairness and effectiveness in the first five years of its operation. Professor Malcolm Harrington was commissioned by the Department of Work and Pensions to undertake the first review of the Work Capability Assessment in Great Britain. Following this he agreed to carry out a similar review in Northern Ireland. I am encouraged by Professor Harrington's assessment that the Work Capability Assessment is improving, and will continue to make improvements and implement reforms to assist those who can work to achieve their potential.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many Disability Living Allowance decisions were appealed; and (ii) how many awards were increased after appeal, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 5959/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as Disability Living Allowance appeals are not recorded by the different category types but on an overall basis. Appeals are received both from applicants who were unsuccessful (nil award) and also from those awarded one of the eleven different rates of Disability Living Allowance but were not satisfied with the particular rate awarded. The table below details the total number of Disability Living Allowance appeals processed by the Appeals Service where the decision was more advantageous to appellant. The main reason for more advantageous decisions is the provision of additional information at the tribunal hearing.

Year	Number of Appeals received in the Appeals Service	Number of Appeal Determinations which were more advantageous to appellant.
2008/09	7,016	1,942
2009/10	5,636	1,836
2010/11	5,580	1,557

Children and Young People: Integrated Services

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development what work his Department has carried out, in conjunction with the Department of Education, in relation to the provision of integrated services for children and young people.
(AQW 5982/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Significant interdependencies exist between the Department of Education priorities in tackling educational under achievement in disadvantaged areas and my Department's goals in relation to addressing social and economic deprivation.

My officials have worked in partnership with DE, and the Education and Library Boards on developing and delivering programmes in relation to integrated services for children and young people, including Raising Achievement Levels Programme in Londonderry and Enjoying Learning and Achieving Programme in Limavady, as well as jointly funding the Integrated Services for Children and Young People Programme in Belfast.

In addition, officials are in preliminary discussions with DE on the development of a new initiative designed to prepare young people for the financial responsibilities that accompanies parenthood.

Housing: Waiting List

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are currently on the housing waiting list, broken down by Housing Executive district office area.
(AQW 6060/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below details the number of applicants registered on the Waiting List at 30 June 2011. These are the most up to date figures available.

District Office	Total
Antrim	988
Armagh	810
Ballycastle	325
Ballymena	1510
Ballymoney	474
Banbridge	659
Bangor	1879
Carrickfergus	1008
Castlereagh	1434
Coleraine	1298
Cookstown	415
Londonderry 1	1020
Londonderry 2	972
Londonderry 3	1011
Downpatrick	1335
Dungannon	1021
East Belfast	1821
Fermanagh	868
Larne	541
Limavady	463
Lisburn Antrim St.	2047
Poleglass	592
Lurgan	1188
Magherafelt	514
Newry	1857
Newtownabbey 1	850
Newtownabbey 2	914
Newtownards	1738
North Belfast	2403
Omagh	598
Outside NI	14
Portadown	762
Shankill	884
South Belfast	2439
Strabane	652
West Belfast	2689
Total	**39993**

Village Urban Renewal Area: Demolition of Remaining Housing

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development for his Department's assessment of whether an environmental impact assessment is required prior to the demolition of the remaining housing in the Village urban renewal area (redevelopment zone); and if so, why.
(AQW 6097/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It is ultimately a matter for Planning Service whether an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is required prior to demolition taking place.

In relation to the Village, Planning Service has already indicated that future demolitions will be subject in the first instance to an EIA screening option and that work is underway. That screening will then inform the need for any further assessment of the environmental impact of proposed demolitions.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Tablet Computers in the Assembly Chamber

Mr Lunn asked the Assembly Commission what plans there are to put facilities in place to enable Members to use a tablet computer in the Assembly chamber.
(AQW 5082/11-15)

Mr McElduff (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): Until such time as the matter is considered the current Speakers Ruling – at paragraph 5.9b of "Speakers Rulings and Conventions" entitled "Mobile Phones" (page 38/39) will continue to apply. However, at its meeting of 13 December 2011, the Committee on Procedures will consider its forward work programme for the January to July 2012 session. One item of interest to the Committee is the use of Hand Held Electronic Devices and it is envisaged that a date for consideration of this matter will be published in the Committee's agreed forward work programme shortly after the December meeting.

There are currently no technical impediments restricting the use of tablet computers in the Assembly chamber. However the use of a '3G' enabled device has the potential to interfere with the audio system used in the Assembly chamber. As a result the preferred mode of real time connectivity of tablet computers to the internet in the Assembly chamber will be wireless.

Parliament Buildings: Visitors

Mr Kinahan asked the Assembly Commission how it monitors the feedback from visitors to Parliament Buildings.
(AQO 969/11-15)

Mr McElduff (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): A Visitor Feedback Form is available in the Great Hall for all visitors to the building. Members of the public who take a tour of the building are specifically encouraged to complete the form.

Since it was introduced in May 2010, 164 people have completed the form. The information is compiled by the Communications Office and circulated to all relevant departments. 88% of visitors to the building stated that their visit met or exceeded their expectations, with 87% stating they would recommend a visit to Parliament Buildings.

The Northern Ireland Assembly Events Office also receives a large amount of informal feedback from visitors via letters and emails. All correspondence is registered in a central feedback database and hard copies are kept in a registered file. Recently the Events Office launched an online feedback form which will be sent to all organisers of events hosted in Parliament Buildings to ensure the team is providing the best possible service.

The Education Service also has a policy to gather visitor feedback. Evaluation forms are completed by the group leaders at the end of each visit and are comprised of very specific questions which indicate visitor satisfaction and inform further development.

This academic year, 100% of respondents to the Education Questionnaire indicated that pupils have a greater understanding of how to engage with the Assembly after an Education Service visit. 100% of respondents also indicated that the activities were pitched at an appropriate level for the audience. The average score for the quality of information delivery was 3.91 out of a maximum score of 4.

Parliament Buildings: Guided Tours

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission why the plaques naming those murdered by the IRA are not mentioned during the guided tours of Parliament Buildings.
(AQO 970/11-15)

Mr McElduff (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The aim of the tour of Parliament Buildings is to provide an insight into the day to day procedural work of the Northern Ireland Assembly. In addition, the tour aims to highlight the building's architecture and usage. As the duration of the tour is only 45 minutes, it is not possible to cover every aspect of the procedural work, architecture and history of usage.

However, if a Member or a group wishes a tour to incorporate a particular feature in more detail, then this request is normally accommodated. The request should be made to the Events Office in advance of the tour.

Parliament Buildings: Tours

Mr McNarry asked the Assembly Commission whether it will consider extending the official tour of Parliament Buildings to include a visit to Lord Craigavon's tomb.
(AQO 971/11-15)

Mr McElduff (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The aim of the tour of Parliament Buildings is to provide an insight into the day to day procedural work of the Northern Ireland Assembly. In addition the tour aims to highlight the building's architecture and usage. As the duration of the tour is only 45 minutes, it is not possible to cover every aspect of the procedural work, architecture and history of usage. However, if a Member or a group wishes a tour to incorporate a particular feature in more detail, then this request is normally accommodated. The request should be made to the Events Office in advance of the tour.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 20 January 2012

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Visits by Heads of State of Foreign Countries

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) to outline what role, either formal or informal, their Department has in relation to planned public and private visits by Heads of State of foreign countries including the President of the Republic of Ireland; and (ii) whether their Department receives advance notification of such visits, and if so, who does it notify.
(AQW 3018/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister):

(i) The Department has no role.

(ii) The Department is usually advised in advance though has no role in notifying others.

Community Relations Council

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 4233/11-15, in relation to the First Minister's Principal Private Secretary making contact with the Community Relations Council, whether the contact was made on the instruction of the First Minister.
(AQW 5661/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Department holds no information with regard to this particular request; however officials would regularly make contact with outside bodies in order to brief Ministers.

Poverty and Social Exclusion

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what measures their Department will introduce to combat poverty and social exclusion.
(AQW 5753/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: As stated within the draft Programme for Government, the Executive remains committed to tackling the problems of poverty and disadvantage here. OFMDFM will continue to forge strong links across the programme to ensure that the work of individual departments integrates to provide optimal solutions for everyone. Our work on addressing poverty and in promoting social inclusion is central to the work of the Executive.

In support of the Child Poverty Strategy, an outcomes model is being developed to drive progress of the plan towards eradicating child poverty.

Our officials have also been working with other departments on a Child Poverty Reduction Pilot Study. The purpose of the study is to quantify the extent to which child poverty can be reduced by allowing families on benefit to retain more of their earned income before deductions from benefit are made and to assess the extent to which additional services such as childcare can support low income families into work.

We also hope to put more detailed proposals on the development of a Childcare Strategy to the Executive early in the New Year.

The Social Investment Fund aims to reduce poverty and unemployment. The Fund's strategic objectives include:

- building pathways to employment; and
- tackling the systemic issues linked to deprivation.

The outcome of the public consultation, which ended on 23 December 2011, will inform how the Social Investment Fund will operate, including the arrangements for funding.

The Executive also proposed a Social Protection Fund to mitigate the impact of the financial cuts on the most vulnerable in our society.

The Executive subsequently agreed to prioritise fuel poverty through this fund and agreed that the £20 million budget would contribute towards a Winter Poverty Payment Scheme, distributed through DSD and DHSSPS.

We believe that the work associated with the Child Poverty Strategy and the Social Investment and Social Protection Funds demonstrates a very clear commitment on our behalf to ensure that those most disadvantaged in our society, by poverty and social exclusion, have their needs addressed.

Youth Work Projects: North Down

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the level of funding provided by their Department to youth work projects in the North Down area in 2011/12; and (ii) the duration of funding in each case.
(AQW 5869/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM does not directly fund youth work as this is the responsibility of other departments. However, we do provide funding towards good relations and summer intervention work which either target or involve young people and youth workers in North Down.

In addition, OFMDFM funds a number of after school clubs. OFMDFM has also provided funding for 2011/12 to Glencraig Integrated Children's Centre totalling £9,131.

Economic Research Institute for Northern Ireland

Mr Lunn asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what independent economic advice is available to Executive Ministers, following the demise of the Economic Research Institute for Northern Ireland.
(AQW 6038/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Independent economic advice is available from a range of sources. These include centres of academic expertise (for example in the universities), research institutes, think tanks, research councils as well as independent researchers. These sources have the potential to offer the Executive independent specialist expertise as well as sufficient flexibility to address new and emerging policy issues. The findings and work of the Independent Review of Economic Policy should also be noted including the establishment of the Economic Advisory Group. The latter consists of a focused group of experts whose role is to provide independent advice, aimed at challenging, and developing, public policy and strategic thinking on the economy.

North American and Executive Priorities

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the delivery of customised programmes to assist Ministers in furthering their North American and Executive priorities.
(AQW 6210/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Responsibility for the delivery of the Department's US and Canadian Strategy lies with the Northern Ireland Bureau which is based in Washington, DC. The Bureau also has one officer based in New York City.

Since April 2011, the Bureau has organised six visit programmes for seven Executive Ministers. All the programmes were designed to relate to each Minister's portfolio and a significant amount of discussion took place in advance of each visit to ensure the best use of the Minister's time while in the United States.

In the past nine months, the Bureau has delivered visit programmes to Washington DC, New York City, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Silicon Valley, New Orleans, Los Angeles and the Durham/Raleigh Triangle, North Carolina.

From our personal perspective, we have used our visits to the US to promote the local economy and to engage on a one-to-one basis with President Obama, Secretary Clinton, members of Congress and potential investors across the USA. In September, we undertook a very successful visit to Los Angeles, Silicon Valley, Chicago and New York. The objective of that visit was to promote our Creative Industries Sector by encouraging investment from IT and Film Production companies on the West Coast and to consolidate relationships with existing high-profile investors in the other locations.

Programme for Government

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how they will ensure that there is regular reporting against the Programme for Government.
(AQW 6366/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The new Programme for Government is supported by a delivery framework within which there are regular monitoring and reporting schedules. The framework for delivery draws upon lessons learned from previous monitoring and reporting regimes. It has been developed to ensure that delivery against priorities and commitments is maximised.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Tree Planting

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) how much land was approved for tree planting in the 2010/11 season; (ii) how much land was planted in the 2010/11 season; and (iii) of the land that was (a) planted; and (b) not planted, what percentage of the applicants dealt directly with the Forestry Service and not through an agent.
(AQW 6405/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development):

(i) From 1st April 2010 to 31st March 2011, there were a total of 608 hectares approved for tree planting.

(ii) Over the same period, a total of 252 hectares were planted.

(iii) All applications are processed by Forest Service whether submitted by an owner or their agent. We do not hold summary data to answer this specific question in relation to planted area, however, we can state that during this period, 49 % of the total number of applications received by Forest Service were through an agent.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Post Project Evaluation: 'Cessation of Interceptor Mixed Stock Fisheries on North Atlantic Salmon not Achieving their Conservation Limits'

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the issues raised by her Department which resulted in the delay of the original completion date of the draft PPE 'Cessation of interceptor mixed stock fisheries on North Atlantic salmon not achieving their conservation limits'.
(AQW 6136/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): My Department is not aware of the draft document referred to in this question.

The Department's salmon conservation policy development is informed by long term research undertaken by colleagues at the Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute (AFBI) and DCAL staff based at the River Bush Salmon Research Station.

The Department's salmon conservation policy development is evidence based and the current recommendations for a voluntary cessation of killing salmon reflect the out working of that ongoing process.

Disabled Car Parking Regulations: Review

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when she intends to undertake a review of disabled car parking regulations in relation to public angling estate waters which have disabled car park facilities available.
(AQW 6138/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department has responsibility for two disabled car parks at Public Angling Estate (PAE) waters which are owned by NI Water.

NI Water has advised my Department of its intention to undertake urgent remedial and maintenance work at a number of reservoirs, including those adjacent to the two disabled car parks. This will result in the temporary closure of not only these PAE waters, but also the disabled car parks while the work is carried out.

As a result of the impending works closing the car parks my Department has delayed the review of arrangements for disabled parking while these works progress.

Fishing: Licensed Nets

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 5609/11-15, whether the representations made by the individuals referred to in AQW 2685/11-15 was made before or after the meetings referred to in AQW 5609/11-15.
(AQW 6139/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The representations made by the individuals referred to in AQW 2685/11-15 took place in December 2008 before the final meetings in 2009 as referred to in AQW 5609/11-15.

Fishing: Illegal or Unlicensed Nets

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 5736/11-15, to confirm if the warning letters issued to two people between 1 June 2009 and 31 March 2010 and the warning letter issued to one person between 1 April 2010 and 31 March 2011 were issued to any person(s) who are licensed by her Department.
(AQW 6140/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I can confirm that the warning letters issued to two people between 1 June 2009 and 31 March 2010 and the warning letter issued to one person between 1 April 2010 and 31 March 2011 were issued to persons who did not hold any licence issued by my Department.

Fishing: Sea Angling

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what are the financial and holistic benefits to Northern Ireland of sea angling.
(AQW 6181/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: A report entitled "The Social and Economic Impact of Recreational Angling in Northern Ireland" was published in 2007 and included sea/shore angling.

The study estimated that domestic sea/shore anglers had an overall gross expenditure impact of £7.4m on 2005.

A specific study into the holistic benefits was not commissioned.

A copy of the report can be accessed at http://www.dcalni.gov.uk/economic_impact_of_angling_final_report_july_2007.pdf

Quangos

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many quangos currently operate under the remit of her Department.
(AQW 6222/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There are currently 5 operating under the remit of the Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure, these are as follows:

- Arts Council NI
- Libraries NI
- National Museums and Galleries NI
- NI Museums Council
- Sport NI

Fishing: Illegal or Unlicensed Nets

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 5736-11-15, for her assessment of the impact the receipt of a warning letter has on the recipient; and whether the receipt of such a letter has an impact on the recipient's renewal applications for other licences that are issued by her Department.
(AQW 6223/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The impact that a warning letter has on a recipient will vary depending on the individual and it is not possible for the Department to assess this impact.

The Department would expect that the recipient of a warning letter would not repeat the actions that lead to the issue of the warning and would comply with any other requirements contained in the letter.

The issue of a warning letter will have no direct impact on the applicant's renewal application for other licences that are issued by the Department.

Fishing: Salmon Fishing Engines in Coastal Waters

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 1837/11-15, to detail the process for the renewal of a licence for salmon fishing engines in coastal waters.
(AQW 6224/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The process for the renewal and issue of a licence for salmon fishing engines in coastal waters are defined in the Fisheries Byelaws (Northern Ireland) 2003, Part II, sections 14 to 23.

2012 Olympics

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding her Department has allocated for the 2012 Olympics; and how much has been spent to date.
(AQW 6254/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: DCAL leads and facilitates the Olympic Strategy in the north through partnership arrangements and the Department has established the Games Legacy Unit to advance work to secure a local legacy from the Games with an allocation of £450k per annum by the Department. This money is not being used to deliver the London 2012 Games – that is the responsibility of the London Organising Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games – but is directed at ensuring programmes, projects and activities related to the Games deliver benefits to communities across the north.

DCAL's total expenditure on local 2012 related programmes is expected to be in the region of £1.8m resource and £0.5m capital by the end of March 2013. DCAL provides funding to local partners to support participation and deliver legacy across three themes of sport including disability sport, community engagement and economic.

Sport Matters: Community Capital Programme

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to list the clubs and groups that are currently involved in the Sport Matters: Community Capital Programme, and the points they have been awarded.
(AQW 6271/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Details of the clubs and groups that are currently involved in the Sport Matters Community Capital Programme, together with the points they were awarded, are as follows:

Applicant Organisation	Points Awarded
Lurgan YMCA	87
St Columb's College, Derry	86
Crumlin United FC	85
Mourne Heritage Trust	81
Omagh Riding for the Disabled Association	81
Burnside Ulster-Scots Society, Antrim	80
Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School, Belfast	80
Moneyslane FC, Banbridge	80
Greenisland FC, Carrickfergus	80
Carrick Rangers FC	79
Omagh District Rifle and Pistol Club	79
Stadium Youth and Community Centre, Belfast	79
Ballinderry Shamrocks GFC, Cookstown	79
Trustees of Kilcluney LOL132, Markethill	78
Colin Glen Trust, Lisburn	78
Lamh Dearg GAC, Lisburn	78
Ardoyne Youth Providers Forum, Belfast	77
Cathedral Youth Club, Derry	77
Countryside Access and Activities Network	77
Dalriada School, Ballymoney	77
Sean Dolans GAC, Derry	77
John Mitchel's Glenullin GAC, Coleraine	77
Regent House School, Ards	77
Shankill United FC, Belfast	76
Eglinton Community Ltd	76
Doire Colmcille GFC, Derry	76
NE Educational & Library Board – Whitehouse Primary & Newtownabbey High School	76
Saints Amateur Boxing Club, Twinbrook	76
Sion Mills Buildings Preservation Trust	76
Aughintober Regeneration, Dungannon	75

Applicant Organisation	Points Awarded
Armagh City FC	75
The Boys Brigade, Belfast	75
Banbridge Amateur Boxing Club	74
Carrickfergus Historical & Cultural Society	74
Maghaberry Community Association, Lisburn	74
NE Educational & Library Board – Bushmills Education Centre	74
Ashton Community Trust	73
Larne FC	73
Tyrone GAA County Board	73
Colaiste Feirste, Belfast	72
East Antrim Rifle & Pistol Club	72
Holywood Yacht Club	72
Malgrove, Belfast	72
Iveagh Branch of the Pony Club, Banbridge	71
Bangor FC	71
Coalisland Fianna GFC	71
Downpatrick FC	71
East Antrim Harriers AC	71
Millenium Integrated Primary School, Castlereagh	71
Mourne All Blacks Amateur Boxing Club	71
St Patrick's GAC, Cookstown	71
Magherabeg Rural Community Association	70
Annagh United FC	70
Belfast Indoor Bowling Club	70
Cairn Lodge Amateur Boxing Club, Belfast	70
Coaching4Christ, Ballymena	70
Portora Boat Club, Enniskillen	70
Share Discovery '80 Ltd, Lisnaskea	70
St Brigid's Cross Community Boxing Club, Newry	70
St Malachy's GAC, Moortown	70
4th Portadown Scouts	69
Abbey Villa FC, Ards	69
Armagh Harps GFC	69
Belfast Education & Library Board – Belfast Boy's Model	69
Carnmoney Primary School, Newtownabbey	69
Castlewellan FC	69
Coa GAA Club, Fermanagh	69
Crossmaglen Rangers FC	69

Applicant Organisation	Points Awarded
Dungannon Rifle & Pistol Club	69
Dungannon United Youth FC	69
Knocks Grattans Hurling Club, Lisnaskea	69
Our Lady's & St Patrick's Mochua's Primary School & Derrynoose GAC, Keady	69
Park FC, Claudy	69
St Joseph's GAC, Ederney	69
Wallace High School, Lisburn	69
Ballymartin GFC	68
Benraw Rural Community Association, Banbridge	68
Caledon Regeneration Partnership	68
Killycurragh Youth Club, Omagh	68
Michael Davitts GAC, Belfast	68
Omagh Bowling Club	68
RUC Athletic Association, Belfast	68
St Mary's GAC, Rasharkin	68
St Peter's GAC, Lurgan	68
Ballyholland Development Association	68
St Killian's College, Larne	67
Clady Sean South GFC, Armagh	67
Eskra Emmett's GAC, Tyrone	67
Magherafelt Sky Blues FC	67
NE Education & Library Board – Woodhall Residential Centre	67
Portadown FC Youth	67
Portballintrae Residents' Association, Coleraine	67
Roslea Shamrocks GFC, Fermanagh	67
St Paul's High School, Newry	67
Newtownbreda FC	67
Ballyholme Yacht Club	66
Ballyhornan & District Community Association	66
Belfast Education & Library Board – Ashfield Girls High School	66
Belnaleck Art McMurrough's GFC, Fermanagh	66
Brackaville Owen Roes GFC, Coalisland	66
Dromore First Presbyterian	66
Tir Na nOg GFC, Craigavon	66
An Charraigh Mhor GFC, Carrickmore	65
City of Armagh RFC	65

Applicant Organisation	Points Awarded
Pomeroy Plunketts GAC, Tyrone	65
St Agnes GAC, Belfast	65
Eire Og Hurling Club, Carrickmore	64
Killeavy GAC	64
O'Neills GFC, Armagh	64
Oxford Sunnyside FC, Craigavon	64
Ballymacnab GFC, Armagh	63
Tullylish GFC, Banbridge	63
St Patrick's GAC, Cullyhanna	63
Clan Na Gael GFC, Craigavon	63
Cushendun GAC, Moyle	62
Sperrin Integrated College, Magherafelt	62
Aughnacloy Golf Club	62
St Michael's GAC, Craigavon	61
Tullygally FC, Armagh	61
Windsor Lawn Tennis Club, Belfast	61
Carey Faughs GAC, Moyle	60
Loughgall Youth, Armagh	60
North Fermanagh Cricket & FC	60
Strand Presbyterian Church, Belfast	60
Armagh Stars Inline Hockey Club	60
Donaghmore Development Association	59
Lurgan District LOL No6	59
Eoghan Ruadh Hurling Club, Dungannon	59
Carrickfergus Sailing Club	57
Carryduff GAC	57
Mournesports Ltd	57
Rathfriland FC	57
Thomas Davis Corrinshego GFC	57
Camlough Rovers FC	55
Russell Gaelic Union, Belfast	55
Tullyvallen Rangers FC	55

Líofa Campaign

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 4521 11/15, whether, as she seeks to move the Irish Language forward in a "positive, progressive and inclusive manner", she will pay any regard to the way in which the Irish Language was politicised by the claim that every word of Irish spoken is another bullet in the struggle.
(AQW 6277/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In progressing the Irish language through programmes such as the Líofa Initiative I aim to broaden the appeal of the Irish language so that it can continue to be enjoyed by all in society.

Irish Language

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of whether the attitude of Republicans in the past, who claimed that every word of Irish spoken is another bullet in the struggle, has contributed negatively to the current attitudes displayed towards the Irish language; and whether that attitude needs to be challenged and reversed in the future.
(AQW 6280/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The rich cultural and linguistic heritage on this island is something that we all share and something that we should all embrace and enjoy.

The Irish language is valued, respected, spoken and enjoyed by people of all backgrounds and traditions.

I am focused on the future development of the Irish Language.

Fishing: Salmon and Inland Fisheries Forum

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 5915/11-15, for her assessment of the effectiveness of the Salmon and Inland Fisheries Forum; and how information is conveyed to her Department, given that departmental officials do not sit on the Forum.
(AQW 6337/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Since its establishment in December 2009 the Salmon and Inland Fisheries Forum (SIFF) has put forward a range of proposals to the Department for consideration and has commented on a number of issues put to it by the Department. I consider the Forum to be an effective conduit to reflect the views of the diverse interests in the sector.

The Forum is a stakeholder representative body and it would be inappropriate for Departmental officials to be members.

Information is conveyed between the Department and the Forum by letter and e-mail. On occasions Departmental officials attend Forum meetings, at the Chairman's request, to address specific issues.

Sectarian Attack: 'The Good Man'

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans she has to restore the confidence of the film and TV production companies choosing Northern Ireland as a location for filming following the sectarian attack on a teenager working on The Good Man.
(AQW 6378/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department does not fund NI Screen's support of the film industry – responsibility for this area lies with DETI and Invest NI.

However, I am assured that NI Screen will continue with its robust, aggressive marketing to the global screen industry and is confident that the growing reputation for film and television in the North of Ireland is undiminished.

This has been a regrettable event that reflects poorly on our society but it does not represent the general experience of the film and television industry in the North of Ireland, whether inward investing or local.

DCAL: Transfer of Functions to Local Government

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, for each of the last five years, to detail the functions that (i) have been transferred; and (ii) are planned to be transferred from her Department to local councils, and of these, to detail (a) the reason behind the transfer of each function; (b) whether additional funding was offered to local councils to assist them in carrying out the functions; and (c) the cost, to her Department, of the final year when each of the functions were the responsibility of her Department; and (iii) may be transferred from her Department to local councils at a future date,
(AQW 6397/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

(i) The Community Festival Fund transferred to Local Government from April 2008. The cost to the Department in its last year of operation within the Department (2007 / 2008) was £450,000 plus £100,000 administration costs. In 2010 / 2011 the department provided £440,000 to local councils for Festival Funding.

(ii) The functions which the Department plan to transfer are;

a. **Armagh County Museum**

Armagh County Museum will transfer to the Armagh / Banbridge / Craigavon Council. This is a local museum which should come under the management of the local council. The cost of running Armagh County Museum in 2010 /2011 was £233,000. This funding will transfer to local government as part of RPA.

b. **Northern Ireland Museums Council (NIMC)**

The NIMC provides a support service to local and private museums and could transfer to local government provided that a suitable arrangement can be agreed with local government. However, the Department will consider where these functions can best be carried out during its review of the body, as part of its wider review of Arms Length Bodies. The cost of NIMC in 2010 / 2011 was £323,000.

c. **Water Recreation Sites**

Twenty one water recreation sites are to transfer to local councils. These are small sites which complement other leisure facilities owned by councils and councils also have the infrastructure to maintain outdoor facilities which DCAL lacks. The cost of maintenance in 2010 / 2011 was £67,000. The maintenance budget would transfer to local councils as part of RPA.

d. **Local Arts Funding**

The Department is committed to transferring the funding for local arts to local government in line with the guiding principles set out for RPA. The budget for local Arts in 2009 / 2010 was calculated at £1.1 million.

(iii) The Department has not identified any further functions which may transfer to local councils at a future date. However my Department has commenced a review of its Arms Length Bodies and this may identify some further functions which could transfer to local councils.

Fishing: Salmon Licences

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she will suspend all licences permitting the sale, or purchase, of salmon caught by rod, line or nets in Northern Ireland waters.
(AQW 6406/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Officials have written to individual stakeholders and representative bodies asking for support for a range of voluntary conservation measures for the 2012 salmon fishing season.

Current legislation does not empower the Department to suspend licences and does not readily enable the introduction of further restrictions on the sale or purchase of salmon in time for the opening of the 2012 fishing season.

DCAL: 0845 Numbers

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much revenue has been raised by her Department in each of the last three financial years by the usage of 0845 numbers.
(AQW 6436/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In the last three financial years, the Department did not operate any 0845 telephone numbers. No revenue has therefore been raised.

Fishing: Applications to Fish for Salmon with Nets

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the closing date for applications to fish for salmon with nets; (ii) the number of applications received to date; and (iii) the date on which she intends to issue the licences.
(AQW 6604/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

(i) The closing date for applications to fish for salmon with nets can be found in the Fisheries Byelaws (Northern Ireland) 2003. The legislation regarding drift net licences can be found in sections 14 to 22. The legislation regarding draft net licences can be found in section 23.

(ii) As of 18 January 2012 the Department has received five applications.

(iii) The Department has written to those who held such licences in 2011 and consideration of their 2012 applications will be informed by their responses.

Department of Education

Primary Languages Programme

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail the benefits of the Primary Languages Programme for children who take part in the programme.
(AQW 6116/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The Primary Languages Programme was introduced to give our youngest pupils in Foundation Stage/Key Stage 1 the opportunity to learn an additional language. One of the main learning outcomes of the programme is to support the development of communication skills and fit with the revised curriculum, particularly Language & Literacy and Citizenship.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board, who administer the Primary Languages Programme, advise that school evaluations of the Primary Languages Programme have been very positive. Teachers comments about the benefits of the programme have included: "participating in the programme has helped to enhance the children's self esteem, developed knowledge and skills involved in the area of learning The World Around Us and has helped develop transferrable skills such as concentration and listening; the programme is having a very positive impact on the children's learning".

The Education Training and Inspection (ETI) carried out an inspection of the programme and listed among the main strengths of the programme as the high levels of motivation and enjoyment of all the children, the good progress made by children, the positive response of parents, principals and teachers.

I am delighted that currently 412 schools are participating in the programme and that each week over 27,000 children are benefitting from the many positive aspects of this programme.

Irish Language Translation

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education how his Department's spend on Irish language translation compares to (i) the Scottish Government's spend on Gádhlig translation; and (ii) the Welsh Executive's spend on Welsh translation.
(AQW 6117/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Comparable information is not available for the Scottish Government's and the Welsh Government's Education Departments.

Integrated Education

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education how much his Department has spent on integrated education in the last three years.
(AQW 6152/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In each of the last three years, my Department has spent the following on integrated education:

Financial Year	**2010-11**	**2009-10**	**2008-09**
£'000	76,390	82,169	77,915

These figures include salaries and non-teaching costs in respect of grant maintained integrated schools, as well as capital expenditure.

School Transport for Pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Needs

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Education to outline the responsibilities of the Education and Library Boards in relation to the provision of school transport for pupils with a statement of special educational needs.
(AQW 6156/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs provides that, when assessing the special educational needs of a pupil and making a statement, an Education and Library Board will take account of non-educational needs. The Board is then responsible for deciding and specifying in the statement any relevant non-educational provision required, such as home to school transport, to meet the non-educational needs of the individual child based on recommendations from and agreement between the health services and/or social services and the Board.

Not every pupil with a statement of special educational needs will have a special transport need. In these cases Boards are responsible for determining whether a pupil is eligible for home to school transport assistance in line with the Department's transport policy Circular 1996/41 (as amended). Not every pupil with a special transport need will receive transport to the school of their parents' choice. If their choice involves a distant school and there is a nearer school which meets the pupil's needs, then Boards are legally required to provide transport only to the nearer school. Where parents prefer the more distant school, a Board may offer an allowance in lieu of transport. Also, pupils may be required to share a vehicle with other pupils who have similar needs.

Pupils special transport needs are also subject to on-going review.

Schools: Fire Safety

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education to detail the legal obligations on primary and post-primary schools in relation to fire safety in schools.
(AQW 6169/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Schools in the North of Ireland are required to meet the requirements of the Fire and Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 and the Fire Safety Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010. This legislation is designed to ensure that buildings provide an acceptable level of fire safety for all people on the premises.

In addition, schools are designed and built to comply with the requirements of the Building Regulations for the North of Ireland that pertain at the time of construction and to comply with the requirements of the Department of Education's School Building Handbook.

Education and Library Boards: Senior Managers

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of senior managers and their salary scale in each Education and Library Board transferring to the Education and Skills Authority.
(AQW 6171/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Review of Public Administration (RPA) outline Business Case required ESA to effect a 44% reduction in senior management posts which equates to 35 posts.

As a result of the Voluntary Severance Programmes for 2010/11 and 2011/12 the number of senior management posts have reduced and this will continue across the Budget period.

The announcement on the establishment of ESA has however changed the context within which the RPA will be implemented in education. ESA will subsume the functions of 8 bodies including the Education and Library Boards; Council for Catholic Maintained Schools; Staff Commission and the Youth Council.

The number of senior managers transferring to ESA cannot therefore be determined until the Voluntary Severance Programmes for 2011/12 and 2012/13 are completed and the impact of CCEA remaining separate for the time being is quantified. The current salary scales for the senior management teams within each organisation are however published in their annual remuneration reports.

All senior managers in the affected organisations in post on the date of the establishment of ESA will have the right to transfer into this organisation under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE).

Irish-medium Schools: Distance Travelled

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education what is the furthest distance a pupil would have to travel if they wish to attend their nearest (i) naíscoil; (ii) bunscoil; and (iii) meánscoil.
(AQW 6201/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department is not able to provide the information requested. However, it is able to provide information relating to the furthest distance pupils currently enrolled at Irish medium schools travel to their school. This is listed in the following table.

Furthest distance travelled to their school by a pupil currently attending an Irish Medium school, 2011/12

School type	Nursery unit	Primary	Post primary
Distance travelled (miles)	17.6	30.6	29.2

Source: school census

Notes:

1 Figures for primary schools include children in reception and Year 1 – Year 7 classes. Children in nursery units in primary schools have been considered separately.

2 Distance travelled by pupils to voluntary and private preschool centres cannot be calculated, as data for this sector is collected at an aggregated school level only.

3 Distance travelled is straight line distance.

4 Pupils travelling to Irish medium units in English language schools have not been included.

Transfer Tests: Preparing Children

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education how many complaints each Education and Library Board has received in relation to preparing primary school children for transfer tests in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6202/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: One written complaint was received by the Western Education and Library Board in the last three years in relation to a primary school in that area preparing its pupils for unregulated transfer tests. No written complaints were received by any of the other boards during that period and records are not kept of any verbal complaints.

School Attendance

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 705/11-15, AQW 706/11-15 and AQW 707/11-15, what specific actions he has taken to reduce the number of children with less than 85 percent school attendance.
(AQW 6215/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Pupils for whom school attendance has dropped below 85 per cent and who require further intervention are referred by the school to the relevant Education and Library Board's Education Welfare Service (EWS).

An Education Welfare Officer (EWO) will carry out a home visit to establish the reason for the poor attendance and will act as lead worker to agree an action plan, with the pupil, the parents and the school and other agencies, as required. For pupils with particular problems regular attendance at their host school, or any other mainstream school, may not be an option. Where this is the case, pupils may be referred by their EWO to a suitable alternative education programme through EOTAS (education other than at school). Court proceedings may also be considered.

My Department has developed over the years a series of support programmes targeted at specific groups of pupils such as school age mothers, Travellers and looked after children, who are known to be at risk of poor attendance. Beyond these specific groups it is recognised that there are other pupils whose pattern of poor attendance or non-attendance remains a concern.

Analysis of attendance data shows that, as the level of free school meal entitlement in a school increases, absence levels also increase. Since free school meal eligibility is indicative of levels of deprivation, my Department has commissioned a research project specifically aimed at identifying good practice in improving attendance in schools serving deprived areas. The findings of this research will be available to the Department by the end of March 2012.

These findings will be disseminated to schools with the aim of helping those with low attendance rates to develop policy and practice to improve attendance.

Grammar Schools: Surplus Places

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of surplus places in grammar schools, broken down by sector.
(AQW 6233/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In the current school year there are 814 places available in grammar schools distributed as follows:-

- 199 in controlled grammar schools
- 615 in voluntary grammar schools.

These figures represent the sum of the differences between all grammar schools' enrolment numbers (the number up to which they must admit) and the number of the pupils actually enrolled. The figures exclude 309 enrolled pupils who are in receipt of a statement of special educational needs and 12 pupils who were (in the last year) admitted on appeal by the Education and Library Board appeal tribunals or by direction of the independent Exceptional Circumstances Body, as they may be admitted outside the agreed enrolment number for a school.

Review of Public Administration: Redundancy Costs

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education for an update on the funding set aside to cover redundancy costs associated with the Review of Public Administration and the creation of the Education and Skills Authority.
(AQW 6234/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The existing budget allocation for voluntary severance/redundancy costs is:

2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
£49.9m	£55.4m	£50.6m	£61.3m

These funds have been set aside to reduce the long term cost base of the education sector, including costs associated with the Review of Public Administration and the creation of the Education and Skills Authority.

Middletown Centre for Autism

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 359/09; AQW 355/09; and AQW 357/09; to provide an update on; (i) what has been the overall gross cost of operating Middletown Autism Centre since its inception; and (ii) what has been his Department's contribution to that cost on a yearly basis.
(AQW 6247/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The overall gross cost of operating the Middletown Centre for Autism since it opened in 2007 is £3,689,620. The Department of Education's contribution to meeting these costs for each financial year is shown below:

Year	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
DE Funding	£205,190	£412,094	£603,527	£618,994

Middletown Centre for Autism

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education, following the Comptroller and Auditor General's 2009 Report on Middletown Autism Centre, whether anything has changed in the interim to contradict the assessment that 'Key services including working directly with young people with autistic spectrum disorders are not being achieved despite the Centre operating since 2007 and it appears unlikely that the position will change in the short term'.
(AQW 6248/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Since the publication of his General Report for 2009 by the Comptroller and Auditor General, the Middletown Centre for Autism has provided intensive specialist support to a number of individual children and schools in each education and library board area on an outreach basis. Referrals to the Centre are made as a result of the continuing close partnership working with education and library boards and the Interboard Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Group.

This intensive specialist support offered by the Centre to these children includes:

- the provision of a trans-disciplinary assessment;
- the development and implementation of intervention using a trans-disciplinary Learning Support Plan;
- supporting the development of an ASD competent school environment;
- specialist placement for intensive assessment and support, as necessary, following assessment.

The Centre has also continued to deliver specialist training to front-line professionals working in education with children and young people with ASD. Over 8,500 professionals have received such training from the Centre since it opened.

Delivery of a programme of training to support parents of children with ASD was commenced by the Centre in October 2010 and nearly 4,000 parents have received this training.

The Centre's Research and Information Service has recently published a fifth research bulletin and continues to progress two island-wide research projects.

Transfer Tests: Preparing Children

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of how schools which prepare children for the transfer tests, instead of teaching the curriculum, are affecting the attainment levels of these children.
(AQW 6273/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Articles 4-9 of the 2006 Education Order place a statutory obligation on primary schools to deliver the primary curriculum to all pupils. The Department of Education also strongly recommends that primary schools do not prepare children for unregulated entrance tests. I am disappointed at reports that some schools ignore this advice and focus valuable school time on preparing some children for these unnecessary tests. This has an impact on both the children taking the test and those who are not taking the test. All pupils are entitled to enjoy the full benefits of the primary curriculum without the distorting effects of being taught to a test or segregated from their peers because some will be coached and others will not.

There are formal mechanisms for parents to make a complaint if they feel that the school is failing to meet its statutory obligation to deliver the curriculum to all its pupils.

In addition to this the Education and Training Inspectorate will advise the Department if, during the course of a formal inspection or an incidental visit to a primary school, they encounter a lesson where children are preparing for unregulated entrance tests. They will also raise the matter with the teacher and the Principal.

Irish-medium Sector

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education what percentage of pupils from the Irish-medium sector, who transferred to post-primary schools, transferred to non-Irish-medium post-primary schools in each of the last ten years.
(AQW 6274/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department is able to provide the information requested for each of the last two academic years. Figures have been provided in relation to those children who did not transfer from Irish medium primary schools or units to either the Irish medium post-primary school, or to Irish medium units.

In 2009/10, of the pupils for whom a destination is known, 58.7% of pupils transferring from Irish medium primary provision did not transfer to post-primary Irish medium schools or units. 27.6% transferred to the Irish medium post-primary school and 13.8% transferred to Irish medium units.

In 2010/11, of the pupils for whom a destination is known, 60.4% of pupils transferring from Irish medium primary provision did not transfer to post-primary Irish medium schools or units. 22.8% transferred to the Irish medium post-primary school and 16.8% transferred to Irish medium units.

Source: NI school census

Notes:

1 There were 13 pupils who had attended Irish medium primary provision in 2009/10 that did not appear in post primary schools here in 2010/11.

2 There were 9 pupils who had attended Irish medium primary provision in 2010/11 that did not appear in post primary schools here in 2011/12.

Naíscoilléanna

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to list all naíscoilléanna, including the location and the enrolment number in each of the last ten years.
(AQW 6278/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested has been placed in the Assembly library.

Bunscoilléanna

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to list all bunscoilléanna, including the location and the enrolment number in each of the last ten years.
(AQW 6279/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested has been placed in the Assembly library.

Curriculum: International Development

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education whether issues relating to international development are included in the curriculum, and if so, to provide details.
(AQW 6286/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The revised curriculum now in place in grant aided schools provides pupils with the opportunity to learn about international development through areas such as Citizenship and Education for Sustainable Development.

Citizenship Education aims to develop the capacity of all young people to participate positively and effectively in society, to influence democratic processes, and to make informed and responsible decisions as local and global citizens throughout their lives. It is compulsory from Year 1 to Year 12.

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is included in the curriculum across all Key Stages. At primary level, ESD is built into the statutory Area of Learning of The World Around Us (Geography, Science and Technology). At post primary, it is included in the statutory areas of Learning for Life and Work (Local and Global Citizenship, Employability), Environment and Society (Geography) and Science and Technology.

Primary Schools: Pupil Numbers

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of pupils in each of the fifty primary schools which currently have the highest number of pupils.
(AQW 6288/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Enrolments in each of the fifty primary schools that have the highest total enrolment – 2011/12

School name	Total enrolment
Strandtown Primary School, Belfast	896
St Bride's Primary School, Belfast	859
St Anne's Primary School, Belfast	856
St Patricks Primary School, Derry	839
St Francis Primary School, Lurgan	815
St Patrick's Primary School Dungannon	777
St Joseph's Primary School, Crumlin	774
Dromore Central Primary School	694
Kilmaine Primary School	667
Holy Trinity Primary School, Enniskillen	647
Holy Trinity Primary School, Belfast	644
Dundonald Primary School	642
King's Park Primary School	627
Abbey Primary School	623
Ballyholme Primary School	618
Tannaghmore Primary School	611
Holy Trinity Primary School, Cookstown	610
Mossley Primary School	606
Christ the Redeemer Primary School	606

School name	Total enrolment
Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School, Belfast	604
Antrim Primary School	596
Downshire Primary School, Hillsborough	592
St Anthony's Primary School, Craigavon	592
Millington Primary School	590
Harmony Hill Primary School	589
Bangor Central Primary School	577
St Oliver Plunkett Primary School, Belfast	575
Rathmore Primary School	575
Pond Park Primary School	568
St John's Primary School, Derry	567
Holy Family Primary School, Magherafelt	561
Termoncanice Primary School	557
Lisnagelvin Primary School	549
St Ita's Primary School, Belfast	537
Elmgrove Primary School	528
Brooklands Primary School	518
Holy Child Primary School, Belfast	514
Fairview Primary School	512
St Bernard's Primary School, Newtownabbey	512
Victoria Primary School, Newtownards	509
Glenwood Primary School	504
Victoria Primary School, Carrickfergus	498
Primate Dixon Primary School	482
Cairnshill Primary School, Belfast	481
Limavady Central Primary School	480
St Joseph's Convent Primary School, Newry	479
St Kevin's Primary School, Belfast	478
St Dallan's Primary School, Warrenpoint	471
Hazelwood Primary School	462
Stranmillis Primary School	454

Source: school census

Note:

1 Figures for primary schools include children in nursery, reception and Year 1 – Year 7 classes.

School Maintenance

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of all maintenance repairs that are required for schools in the North Down area.
(AQW 6290/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The current cost of all maintenance repairs required for schools in the North Down area is £9.3 million, including a maintenance backlog figure of £4.8 million for Bangor Grammar School's existing premises. You will be aware that the new school build for Bangor Grammar is currently under construction. When complete, this will significantly reduce the maintenance backlog in this area.

DE: Transfer of Functions to Local Government

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Education, for each of the last five years, to detail the functions that (i) have been transferred; and (ii) are planned to be transferred from his Department to local councils, and of these, to detail (a) the reason behind the transfer of each function; (b) whether additional funding was offered to local councils to assist them in carrying out the functions; and (c) the cost, to his Department, of the final year when each of the functions were the responsibility of his Department; and (iii) may be transferred from his Department to local councils at a future date,
(AQW 6319/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: No functions have transferred from my Department to local councils during the last five years, and I have no plans to transfer any functions.

Truancy

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Education to detail the level of truancy in each of the last three years (i) in total; and (ii) broken down by school.
(AQW 6332/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Information on pupil absence is recorded under a number of categories. The term truancy is not used as a descriptor. However the following four types of absence are categorised as unauthorised absence:

- No reason provided for absence
- Family holiday (not agreed)
- Reason provided not acceptable
- Late (after registration closed with no acceptable reason for lateness)

(i) The total levels of unauthorised absence in 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10 are as follows:

	% of total half days		
	Primary Schools	**Post Primary Schools**	**Special Schools**
2007/08	1.1	2.6	3.2
2008/09	1.2	2.5	3.3
2009/10	1.3	2.6	3.4

(ii) Attendance statistics for grant aided primary, post primary and special schools detailing both authorised and unauthorised absence is published annually by the Department and is available, broken down by school, for the years 2007/08, 2008/09 and 2009/10 at the link below. Statistics for the 2010/11 school year will be published by March 2012.

http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch_pg/32-statistics_and_research_statistics_on_education_pg/32_statistics_and_research_-_statistics_on_education-pupil_attendance.htm

Middletown Centre for Autism

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Education what has been the total cost of Middletown Autism Centre in each year since 2002.
(AQW 6333/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Middletown Centre for Autism is funded jointly on a 50/50 basis by the Department of Education and the Department for Education and Skills in the south. The Department of Education's total annual expenditure on the Middletown Centre for Autism project for each financial year is shown below. The Department of Education and Skills in the south has contributed an equivalent amount.

Year	Expenditure
2002/03	£55,069
2003/04	£181,576
2004/05	£1,729,195
2005/06	£103,962
2006/07	£139,233

Year	Expenditure
2007/08	£564,702
2008/09	£784,369
2009/10	£737,859
2010/11	£807,113

Languages Taught in Post-primary Schools

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the languages taught in post-primary schools; and (ii) the number of (a GCSEs; (b) A Levels that were taken in each language in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6338/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

(i) Modern languages are included as a statutory area of learning under the revised curriculum at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. While schools are now able to choose from any of the languages of the 27 EU member states to meet the requirements of the statutory curriculum, and can also offer other languages, the choice will vary from school to school and the Department does not hold information on the full list of languages taught in schools. It does however hold information on examination entries which provides an indication of the languages taught in post-primary schools and this is provided below.

(ii) (a) The number of GCSE entries in each language in each of the last three years is detailed in the table below.

GCSE entries1 in each language, 2008/09 to 2010/11

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Irish[2]	1696	1657	1656
Dutch	0	0	1
French	7605	7100	6510
German	1208	1251	1044
Italian	40	26	30
Portuguese	10	1	6
Spanish	3060	3113	3342
Arabic	2	6	1
Bengali	1	0	0
Chinese	30	12	13
Polish	40	48	49
Russian	12	15	27
Urdu	0	2	0
Turkish	1	0	0
Persian	1	0	1
Greek	12	4	12
Latin	134	120	91

Notes

1 Data are sourced from the RM data solutions dataset

2 Excludes Gaeilge

(b) The number of A level entries in each language in each of the last three years is detailed below.

A level entries1 in each language, 2008/09 to 2010/11

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Irish[2]	328	334	319
Dutch	0	1	0
French	657	707	562
German	137	153	113
Italian	2	0	1
Portuguese	1	1	3
Spanish	407	443	461
Arabic	0	0	0
Bengali	0	0	1
Chinese	37	26	30
Polish	4	12	21
Russian	9	2	6
Urdu	0	0	0
Turkish	0	0	1
Persian	0	0	0
Greek	0	1	3
Latin	16	20	19

Notes

1 Data are sourced from the RM data solutions dataset

2 Excludes Gaeilge

Irish-medium Units in Primary Schools

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to list all Irish-medium units in primary schools, including the location and the enrolment number in each of the last ten years.
(AQW 6339/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is provided in the table below.

Enrolments at Irish Medium units in primary schools, 2002/03 – 2011/12

School	Local Government District	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Christian Brothers' PS, Armagh	Armagh	108	108	109	110	112
Our Lady And St Patricks Primary School, Downpatrick	Down	na	na	na	na	na
St Brigid's PS Tirkane	Magherafelt	73	72	68	64	66
St Canice's PS, Dungiven	Limavady	14	24	31	37	56
St Columbkille's PS, Omagh	Omagh	na	8	13	19	34
St Francis PS, Lurgan	Craigavon	22	38	55	71	95
St John The Baptist PS, Portadown	Craigavon	39	47	52	50	47
St Mary's PS, Pomeroy	Cookstown	na	14	16	19	21

School	Local Government District	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
St Patrick's Boys' PS, Downpatrick	Down	40	46	57	70	69
St Patrick's PS, Crossmaglen	Newry & Mourne	na	13	30	38	53
St Patrick's PS, Gortin	Omagh	21	31	35	38	4

School	Local Government District	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Christian Brothers' PS, Armagh	Armagh	118	110	140	142	143
Our Lady And St Patricks Primary School, Downpatrick	Down	na	na	na	na	78
St Brigid's PS Tirkane	Magherafelt	75	80	91	86	94
St Canice's PS, Dungiven	Limavady	51	58	54	58	60
St Columbkille's PS, Omagh	Omagh	41	49	53	49	53
St Francis PS, Lurgan	Craigavon	109	110	107	121	129
St John The Baptist PS, Portadown	Craigavon	50	46	44	45	42
St Mary's PS, Pomeroy	Cookstown	25	29	19	16	10
St Patrick's Boys' PS, Downpatrick	Down	75	74	76	76	na
St Patrick's PS, Crossmaglen	Newry & Mourne	70	78	97	103	99
St Patrick's PS, Gortin	Omagh	na	na	na	na	na

Source: school census

Note:

5 Figures for primary include children in nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.

6 'na' means school was not open during that academic year.

Irish-medium Units in Schools

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of pupils attending each Irish-medium unit in a school, as a percentage of the total number of pupils in each school, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 6340/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the Tables below.

Percentage pupils in Irish medium units as a proportion of the total school enrolment – primary schools - 2007/08 – 011/12

School	Local Government District	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Christian Brothers' PS, Armagh	Armagh	38.1	34.4	38.8	38.0	37.7
Our Lady And St Patricks Primary School, Downpatrick	Down	na	na	na	na	19.0
St Brigid's PS Tirkane	Magherafelt	56.4	55.2	58.7	59.3	58.4
St Canice's PS, Dungiven	Limavady	13.1	15.3	14.9	16.1	17.2
St Columbkille's PS, Omagh	Omagh	14.5	17.1	18.3	17.4	17.6
St Francis PS, Lurgan	Craigavon	14.3	14.2	14.0	15.4	15.8
St John The Baptist PS, Portadown	Craigavon	13.3	12.8	12.1	11.9	10.9

School	Local Government District	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
St Mary's PS, Pomeroy	Cookstown	14.5	16.0	11.4	9.8	6.1
St Patrick's Boys' PS, Downpatrick	Down	24.5	26.3	28.4	29.9	na
St Patrick's PS, Crossmaglen	Newry & Mourne	22.2	25.6	30.8	31.4	30.3
St Patrick's PS, Gortin	Omagh	na	na	na	na	na

Percentage pupils in Irish medium units as a proportion of the total school enrolment – post-primary schools - 2007/08 –2011/12

School	Local Government District	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
St Brigid's College, Derry	Derry	3.4	2.8	2.2	2.0	1.2
St Catherine's College, Armagh	Armagh	9.2	10.2	11.5	11.3	14.1
St Joseph's Grammar School, Donaghmore	Dungannon	na	na	na	2.7	5.9
St Malachy's High School, Castlewellan	Down	na	na	na	na	0.5

Source: school census

Note:

7 Figures for primary include children in nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.

8 'na' means school was not open during that academic year.

Schools: Services Expected in a Climate of Severe Budget Cuts

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Education what strategic direction his Department is giving in relation to the level and quality of services expected from schools in a climate of severe budget cuts.
(AQW 6374/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My statement to the Assembly, "Putting Pupils First: Shaping our Future", set out the strategic direction for the education service and committed to the delivery of a significant programme of strategic, transformational change designed to ensure that we have an effective and efficient education system that puts the needs and aspirations of children and young people to the fore.

My focus is on improving educational outcomes for all young people; on ensuring the provision of a network of strong, sustainable schools planned on an area basis; and, through the establishment of ESA, on streamlining education administration.

I expect school governors to work within the resources available to them to ensure that their schools are effectively led and have an ethos of high expectations; that they deliver high quality teaching and learning; that they maintain a focus on the needs and wellbeing of every pupil; and that the curriculum they offer is broad, balanced, relevant and meets the requirements of legislation.

Since my appointment last May I have consistently highlighted the fact that the education budget faces unprecedented financial challenges over the next three years. I am on record as stating that I would argue the case with Executive colleagues for further investment to help alleviate pressures on school budgets.

On 12 January 2012 I announced £120m of additional funding for the Aggregated Schools Budget (ASB) over the next three years.

Whilst this is welcome news it is important to stress that these additional funds have alleviated rather than eradicated the financial pressures on schools. Even with this additional funding my Department faces a real terms reduction of £180m (9.2%) in resource funding by 2014/15, compared to the 2010/11 baseline.

Home to School Transport Policy

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Education what progress his Department has made in relation to the revision of the Home To School Transport Policy.
(AQW 6375/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am at present considering possible terms of reference for a policy review of the home to school transport scheme. A number of on-going initiatives such as the recently commissioned schools audit and the recently completed report into transport efficiency of the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit have the potential to impact upon transport operations in the immediate and longer term. It will be important to take account of this context in progressing the review.

InCAS

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the current position in relation to InCAS; (ii) if it is to be discontinued to detail the reasons; and (iii) the revenue used to introduce InCAS.
(AQW 6379/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

(i) The Interactive Computerised Assessment System (InCAS) was the method specified by the Department to be used by schools in carrying out assessments in the autumn term. Schools administer the assessments throughout the term. The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) monitors feedback from schools and receives regular reports from the developers about the performance of their systems. No systemic issues have been raised by schools this year.

(ii) The contract with the University of Durham's Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring (CEM) for provision of the InCAS assessments will end in January 2012 and there is no scope for further extension under the rules governing public procurement. The use of data from computer-based assessments remains a key aspect of the Department's school improvement policy and a public procurement process has been carried out to identify suppliers from September 2012 onwards. The procurement process concluded on 8 November 2011 and identified two new providers for separate Literacy and Numeracy assessments:

- Tribal Education Ltd. for the Literacy assessment; and
- Rising Stars UK Ltd. for the Numeracy assessment.

Schools have been notified about this outcome and more detailed communication, including arrangements for trialling and evaluation of the new assessments prior to implementation, will issue in the near future.

(iii) The revenue used to introduce InCAS was as follows:

2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
£58k	£272k	£756k	£687k	£881k	£347k	£423k

DE: 0845 Numbers

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Education how much revenue has been raised by his Department in each of the last three financial years by the usage of 0845 numbers,
(AQW 6392/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has not raised any revenue in each of the last three financial years by the usage of 0845 numbers.

STEM Subjects: Truck

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the success of the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics bus.
(AQW 6461/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The STEM truck is a unique and flexible teaching laboratory which helps bring to life, inspire and profile the opportunities offered by Science Technology Engineering and Maths for pupils and teachers. The STEM truck has been in constant demand, making over 250 visits to schools, conferences and exhibitions as well as participating in many events across Ireland, since its launch in September 2009. It has been extremely well received.

STEM Subjects: Truck

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what plans he has for the continued operation of the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics bus, and the introduction of additional buses.
(AQW 6462/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The STEM truck is a significant investment in, and a valuable resource for, the promotion of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths within schools and I can confirm that it continues to play a key role in support of my Department's wider work to promote STEM in schools and to encourage young people to continue to study STEM-related courses.

I can confirm, however, that I have no plans to commission additional trucks at this stage.

Department for Employment and Learning

University of Ulster: Free iPads

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) whether it is practice to supply post-graduate students undertaking a diploma at the Graduate School of Professional Legal Education at the Magee campus of the University of Ulster

with free iPads; (ii) whether the same provision is made for staff and other students at the School of Law; and (iii) to detail the cost of providing the iPads in each case.
(AQW 6112/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): The University of Ulster, as with any university, is free to use its Teaching and Learning funding for purposes associated with Teaching and Learning. However, as my Department does not hold this detailed information, you may wish to contact the University of Ulster directly.

Queen's University Belfast: School of Nursing and Midwifery

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps Queen's University, Belfast School of Nursing and Midwifery takes when offering clinical placements to facilitate mature students with young children, who find it difficult to travel long distances to attend placements.
(AQW 6123/11-15)

Dr Farry: Queen's University Belfast has said that it advises all students, as part of their application packs and subsequent interview notification letters, that they will be required to undertake regional clinical placements, with varying shift patterns. Students cannot choose the location or timing of placements and are advised that travel difficulties, childcare and domestic arrangements do not qualify as extenuating circumstances when requesting a change of placement.

Students are normally advised of their clinical placements eight weeks in advance to allow sufficient time for personal arrangements to be made. In addition, there is a one-week period following release of the placement details whereby students can apply for a placement change/swop with another student if this meets curriculum needs. Students, judged to be fit for placement, are deemed to be fit for allocation to any clinical area.

Hospitality: Honorary Graduates

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much each university spent on providing hospitality for honorary graduates in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6129/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department does not provide funding for the provision of hospitality for honorary graduates and therefore does not hold any data on the cost of this. However, the universities have provided the following information on such spend in relation to each of the last three years.

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
QUB	£33,171	£17,843	£15,304
UU	£17,046	£5,587	£4,726

The Queen's University of Belfast has advised that the year 2008/09 reflects conferral of a higher number of honorary degrees than would be normal; these were an integral part of the celebrations marking the centenary of the University. Travel costs are included in the figures shown above.

The University of Ulster has advised that it does not provide specific hospitality to those invited to receive honorary degrees. However, when an individual accepts an invitation to receive an honorary degree, the University offers to pay reasonable travel and accommodation costs to enable the individual and a family member or guest to attend the ceremony.

North West Regional College

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to provide copies of all correspondence between his Department and the governing body and the principal of the North West Regional College in relation to the on-going industrial relations dispute at the college.
(AQW 6130/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department has encouraged the governing body of North West Regional College to take all necessary steps to help resolve the current dispute between college management and the University and College Union (UCU). Following receipt of the report it commissioned into the application of redundancy and redeployment procedures, the governing body is considering the findings and is undertaking its own review of the background to the dispute. In the circumstances, I do not consider that the release of correspondence regarding this matter would be conducive to its resolution.

North West Regional College: PricewaterhouseCoopers Report on Human Resource Practices

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to provide copies of (i) all versions of PricewaterhouseCoopers' report into human resource practices at the North West Regional College; and (ii) all correspondence from (a) the governing body of the college; and (b) PricewaterhouseCoopers in relation to the reports.
(AQW 6131/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Governing Body of North West Regional College commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers to undertake a review of the application of redundancy and redeployment procedures by the college's management. The Governing Body is considering the findings of that report with a view to taking any further steps it deems necessary to address the concerns that have been raised. In the circumstances, the publication of correspondence on this matter would not assist the resolution of the dispute. However, I have referred the Member's request for a copy of the PWC report to the Chair of the Governing Body, for consideration.

Bridge to Employment Places in Software Development/Software Testing

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the (i) number; and (ii) location of Bridge to Employment places in software development/software testing in each constituency.
(AQW 6132/11-15)

Dr Farry: In 2009/10 there were 32 successful placements from Bridge to Employment in software development/software testing in Belfast South.

In 2010/11 there were 61 in Belfast South and 23 in Foyle.

University of Ulster: Undergraduate Places at the Magee Campus and Coleraine Campus

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the net increase/decrease in undergraduate places at the (i) Magee campus; and (ii) Coleraine campus of the University of Ulster, resulting from the announcement by the University's Vice-Chancellor on rationalisation at the campuses.
(AQW 6133/11-15)

Dr Farry: The University of Ulster has said that its rationalisation of places is due to the additional places allocated to the University by my Department and the need to achieve operational efficiencies. Places funded by both my Department and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) are affected. The net impact is as follows:

Magee campus:

(i) +380

Coleraine campus:

(ii) 0 (zero)

The University has also stated that these changes will be phased in over the next 3 years in line with the release of the additional places funded by my Department.

Stranmillis University College and Queen's University Belfast: Proposed Merger

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what is meant by the term 'agreed, in principle' contained in his Department's press release of 21 December 2011, which states that the Stranmillis University College Governors had 'agreed, in principle' to the merger of Stranmillis University College and Queen's University, Belfast given the discontent around the proposed merger, the disparity with St Mary's University College, Belfast and the suspension of the merger discussions.
(AQW 6187/11-15)

Dr Farry: The term 'agreed, in principle' means that the Governing Body of Stranmillis has agreed to a merger of the College with Queen's University Belfast but recognises that this is subject to the completion of due process including approval by the Assembly of relevant legislation to discontinue the College.

Certificate of Religious Education

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 6104/11-15, whether St Mary's University College, Belfast has a rule, directive or standing order, on the instruction of representatives of the Catholic Church, that it will not accommodate Stranmillis University College students in the sitting of the Catholic Certificate of Religious Education.
(AQW 6427/11-15)

Dr Farry: I referred the Member's question to St. Mary's University College and I have been informed that there are no rules, directives or instructions emanating from any source which would prevent the College from offering the Certificate of Religious Education to students from Stranmillis University College.

Stranmillis University College and Queen's University Belfast: Proposed Merger

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether Queen's University, Belfast has offered Methodist College, Belfast the opportunity to exchange sites with Stranmillis University College, Belfast, should the proposed merger of Queen's and Stranmillis go ahead.
(AQW 6504/11-15)

Dr Farry: Queen's University Belfast has advised me that it has not offered Methodist College, Belfast the opportunity to exchange sites with Stranmillis University College, Belfast should the proposed merger of Queen's and Stranmillis go ahead.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the time frame for the planned consultation on Education Maintenance Allowance.
(AQW 6597/11-15)

Dr Farry: I can advise the Member that my Department and the Department of Education are currently considering a range of options for the future of the Education Maintenance Allowance scheme.

Once joint Ministerial agreement has been secured on the options to be taken forward, it is intended that these options will be presented to the Executive as soon as practically possible and this will be followed by a public consultation.

Any proposals to change the current provision of the Education Maintenance Allowance scheme in Northern Ireland will also be subject to the appropriate equality considerations.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Invest NI: East Antrim

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many initial business advice sessions, training plans and business plans have been delivered by InvestNI in the East Antrim constituency since 30 September 2011.
(AQO 1043/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Invest NI is not currently delivering a Business Start Programme.

Invest NI had proposed to launch a new Business Start Programme on 1st October 2011. However the launch of this programme has been delayed as a result of legal action by Enterprise Northern Ireland challenging the award decision.

Those individuals in East Antrim interested in starting a business can access relevant advice and guidance through Invest NI's North Eastern Office in Ballymena.

Jobs Fund: West Belfast

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many jobs have been created in West Belfast as a result of the Jobs Fund since its establishment.
(AQO 1037/11-15)

Mrs Foster: To date The Jobs Fund, through its Neighbourhood Renewal Area Business Start grant, has issued offers of support to sixty three individuals to start new businesses in West Belfast. While many of these businesses are still at a very early stage, this support has already led directly to the creation of 19 new jobs.

In addition, a further nine new young entrepreneurs aged 16-24 have also been offered support through the NEET Business Start Grant (aimed at young people Not in Employment, Education or Training). The Jobs Fund has also provided support to three social enterprises based in West Belfast which will create a further seven new jobs.

As you know, the Jobs Fund is ongoing and Invest NI is continuing to build a pipeline of projects which will lead to further new job creation in West Belfast in the near future.

Tourism: "The Gathering"

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the impact on visitor numbers arising from the initiative taken by the Dublin government to launch 'The Gathering: An Irish Homecoming' in 2013.
(AQO 1039/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Gathering is an initiative being run by the Republic of Ireland Government with the aim of attracting the diaspora home for a holiday during 2013. Any increase in tourism numbers to the Island is to be welcomed and Northern Ireland is well placed to benefit as the initiative fits in well with our plans for 2013 when Londonderry is the UK City of Culture and Northern Ireland is hosting the World Police and Fire Games. Not to mention that we will also have Titanic Belfast and the new Causeway Visitor Centre to offer tourists in 2013.

We will capitalise on all the tourism initiatives running in 2013 to maximize visitor numbers to Northern Ireland.

Golf: Irish Open

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline how her Department intends to maximise the tourism potential arising from the Irish Open Golf Competition that is to be held in Portrush.
(AQO 1040/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The staging of the Irish Open in July at Royal Portrush presents a wonderful opportunity for both NITB and Tourism Ireland to showcase golf to prospective visitors in the UK, Ireland and worldwide. Tourism Ireland will exploit every potential

promotional opportunity this year in Great Britain, and in other important golf markets, to capitalise on the potential of this prestigious sporting event and have extended their 'Home of Champions' campaign for 2012.

The Irish Open will be integrated into the ni 2012 marketing activity and be included in all the key communications.

Jobs Fund

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the Jobs Fund.
(AQO 1041/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As you will be aware, the £19 million Jobs Fund has been developed to help businesses create new, sustainable jobs that will tackle our current levels of unemployment.

To date there has been an encouraging uptake and the Jobs Fund is already making a positive impact on achieving its target of creating 4,000 new jobs by March 2014. The largest single project announced under the fund so far was the 336 job announcement by Capita Life and Pensions in Belfast. Alongside this there have been a number of smaller announcements where businesses have been supported to create more modest, but no less important, numbers of jobs. These have included Creative Composites in Lisburn, Axa Insurance, Fresh Food Kitchen and One Stop Data - all based in Londonderry, Enterprise Stationary in Lurgan and most recently JMG Systems based in Omagh. Collectively these projects illustrate the range of businesses which can benefit from the fund.

The Jobs Fund also includes support for new business starts by residents of Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRA) and by young people Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) and this support has already led to the creation of almost 100 new jobs.

Across all its measures the Jobs Fund has now actually created over 300 new jobs. I can also confirm that Invest NI is maintaining a healthy pipeline of potential projects and at present there are over 60 diverse projects at different stages of development. Collectively these proposals have the potential to create a further 1,250 new jobs.

Renewable Energy

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what lessons her Department has learnt from the manner in which the Scottish Government has promoted renewable energy sources.
(AQO 1042/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Scottish Government is committed to generating an equivalent of 100% of electricity demand from renewable sources by 2020 given the high level of renewable resources available in Scotland.

The Northern Ireland target is to achieve 40% electricity consumption from renewable sources by 2020. This is an evidence based target set against the amount of renewable resource available.

The cost of additional grid infrastructure required to facilitate renewables will be met by our relatively small consumer base whereas in Scotland, the cost is spread across all GB consumers.

Hotels: Ballycastle

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what her Department is doing to increase the number of hotel rooms for tourists in the Ballycastle area.
(AQO 1044/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The development of 4 & 5 star hotels in the region is documented as a strategic action in the Causeway Coast and Glens Tourism Masterplan 2004 – 2013 and NITB supports this.

Investment in hotel accommodation will require the private sector to take the lead albeit that they can apply for support through Invest NI.

Invest NI will meet with any promoter and NITB's Quality & Standards Unit can also provide advice regarding compliance with tourism legislation and star rating requirements.

Invest NI: Walsh Doherty Capital

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the nature of the relationship between InvestNI and Walsh Doherty Capital.
(AQO 1045/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Other than being an invitee to an event originally planned for October 2011 which subsequently did not take place, Invest NI does not, nor ever has had, any relationship with Walsh Doherty.

Gas Network

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on her plans to expand the gas network.
(AQO 1046/11-15)

Mrs Foster: During 2011, my Department carried out a 3 month consultation on the potential for extending the natural gas network in Northern Ireland. This closed on 30 September 2011 with 29 responses received. I have assessed the responses and consider that there is sufficient support for extension of the natural gas network to allow the matter to be progressed to the next stage. This will involve preparation of the outline business case, followed by a more detailed economic appraisal and close working with the Utility Regulator in relation to the nature and geographical extent of prospective gas licence areas. In respect of taking gas to towns in the West of Northern Ireland, a licence competition(s) and award, network design, and various consents will be necessary. Hence construction of any new gas transmission networks is unlikely to commence before spring 2015, with gas distribution roll-out following thereafter.

Hotels: North Antrim

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the need for additional hotel accommodation on the North Antrim coast from a tourism perspective.
(AQO 1047/11-15)

Mrs Foster: NITB is undertaking a research exercise aimed at identifying future tourism accommodation requirements. Without pre-judging results it is likely that this will continue to highlight the requirement for accommodation on the north coast.

Development of hotels in the region is documented in the Causeway Coast and Glens Tourism Masterplan 2004-2013.

Department of the Environment

Conservation Areas: Breaches of Planning Permission

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of breaches of planning applications for conservation areas in each of the last three years.
(AQW 4431/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): Enforcement cases are categorised on the Departments IT data base by Breach Type. The number of cases relating to Breach of Conditions investigated by the Department in each of the last 3 years is set out in the table below.

	2009/10	**2010/11**	**2011/12**	**Total**
Breach of Condition	778	551	252	**1581**

To identify which cases relate to Conservation Areas a manual search of files would need to be carried out. This is disproportionate in terms of time and costs and would result in unvalidated statistics being released.

It is however possible to extract information in relation to demolition in conservation areas from the database.

The number of cases relating to the alleged demolition within Conservation Areas investigated by the Department in each of the last 3 business years is set out in the table below.

	2009/10	**2010/11**	**2011/12**	**Total**
Demolition in Conservation Area	8	6	5	**19**

In terms of 'live' cases, as of 1 December 2011, there were 3 live cases relating to the alleged demolition within Conservation Areas under investigation by the Department.

Unnecessary Packaging for Products

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment what steps his Department intends to take to reduce the amount of unnecessary packaging for products, particularly products aimed at children.
(AQW 4667/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department, in conjunction with DEFRA and the Devolved Administrations of Scotland and Wales, developed a strategy in June 2009 'Making the most of packaging' aimed at reducing the impact of packaging on the environment and encouraging design based on sustainability principles. This strategy underpins proposals and targets for reducing packaging through producer responsibility legislation and initiatives such as the 'Courtauld Commitment'.

The Courtauld Commitment is a voluntary agreement between the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP, an organisation funded by the Department) and members of the British Retail Consortium, the Food and Drink Federation and manufacturing sectors that sets targets and aims, amongst other things, to reduce primary packaging. As part of its wider work on packaging reductions, WRAP will work with manufacturers and retailers products considered excessively packaged e.g. work already carried out with industry has resulted in a 25-30% reduction in Easter Egg packaging. The current agreement runs until December 2012 when results will be reported.

The Department is currently developing new ambitious targets for recovery and recycling of packaging waste up to 2017 through amendments to the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations (NI) 2007. It is anticipated that the introduction of these industry targets will reduce the amount of non - recyclable primary packaging used in their products and result in an additional 2.3million tonnes of packaging being diverted from landfill compared to 2010.

The Department is also involved in educating children through its Rethink Waste campaign and partial funding of the Eco- Schools initiative whereby schools and their children are encouraged to develop environmental awareness and actions which extend to the wider community. By participating in events such as waste free lunch initiatives and reducing packaging in lunch boxes children are made aware of the impact of excess packaging on the environment.

During 2010/11 the Department provided grant assistance of £80k to Tidy NI to fund the Eco-Schools Project. This grant was awarded to update educational 'waste' resources and to boost Eco-school registration to around 60% of all NI schools. This funding also assisted with the production of new Key Stage books to support the waste related messages, especially the 3R message – Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, within the Eco-Schools Programme and be more broadly available for children online and at libraries. In addition, Bryson House was also awarded a Rethink Waste (Revenue) grant of £62k to implement a number of measureable waste prevention activities in schools. These activities are undertaken in conjunction with TidyNI as part of the Eco-Schools project.

To ensure that this work continues an additional injection of funding amounting to £105,000 has been made available during this current financial year with a further £80,000 set aside up to 2014.

Derelict Buildings and Incomplete Brownfield Sites

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of derelict buildings and incomplete brownfield sites which have become eyesores and which could potentially become (i) areas for fly-tipping; or (ii) adventure playgrounds for children. **(AQW 4733/11-15)**

Mr Attwood: I am becoming increasingly aware of the growing problem of derelict buildings and incomplete brownfield sites that have the potential to become eyesores, and which could be used as areas for fly-tipping or adventure playgrounds for children.

As Minister I convened an interagency discussion in Portstewart on 7th October 2011 to address the growing problem of dereliction and dilapidation in the coastal towns of Portrush and Portstewart. However, this is a problem clearly prevalent in many of our settlements.

I considered the summit an opportune time for myself as Minister, to show good authority, to intervene and maximise response from those who have a responsibility in tackling these issues in our settlements. In attendance were Planning officials, Coleraine Borough Council, Environmental Services, NIHE, DSD and the Portrush Regeneration Manager.

Officials have advised that the Department of the Environment has no powers to make developers implement a grant of planning permission or to force the completion of any building works that have begun on site. Whilst Article 37 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 (the Planning Order) enables the Department to terminate a planning permission, in certain circumstances, invoking these powers would not have the desired effect at those sites where the developer is not implementing the permission due to the current economic climate.

A number of other Government Departments and statutory bodies do have powers, however, to address some of the problems associated with derelict buildings and incomplete brownfield sites across Northern Ireland.

District councils have powers under Articles 65 and 66 of the Pollution Control and Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 to deal with defective premises that are in such a state as to be prejudicial to health or a nuisance, and to deal with ruinous and dilapidated buildings and neglected sites that are seriously detrimental to the amenities of a neighbourhood. In certain circumstances, district councils may also be able to take action under; section 75 of the Town Improvement (Ireland) Act 1854, where the condition of premises gives rise to a danger to neighbours or passers by; sections 107 to 127 of the Public Health (Ireland) Act 1878, in respect of premises which are in such a state as to be a nuisance or prejudicial to health; or section one of the Public Health and Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 1962, which applies section 30 of the Public Health Acts Amendment Act 1907, in respect of dangerous buildings etc which are fronting, adjoining or abutting a street or public footpath.

The Minister for Social Development (DSD) has advised that his Department is aware of the potential hazards presented by derelict buildings and incomplete brownfield sites. His Department is working closely with other organisations such as the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, who are also taking forward work on empty homes in order to both reduce the consequences of blight and increase housing supply particularly in the private sector, local councils and the respective property owners to ensure all steps are taken to minimise such risks. His Department's Development Offices monitor the situation in this respect very closely and are proactive in introducing appropriate barriers to deter such activity.

The Minister for Regional Development, has advised that as the majority of buildings are located on land adjacent to public roads, it is the responsibility of property owners, or occupiers of those lands, to ensure that such properties or building sites do not endanger or obstruct road users.

During routine maintenance inspections, his Department's Roads Service may identify buildings or properties that could endanger or obstruct road users. Members of the public or public representatives would also, from time to time, report suspect buildings/ properties to a local Roads Service Section Office. In both cases, these reports are usually forwarded to the local council's Building Control office, for attention.

In some cases, Roads Service may also try to identify the owners/occupiers of the building, to seek their co-operation in removing the danger, which may include the erection of temporary signing and fencing. Should this course of action fail, Roads Service has powers, under Article 51 of the Roads (NI) Order 1993, to serve a notice on the owner/occupier. This would require them to carry out such works so as to remove the hazard, if in Roads Service's opinion, it considers that the building, wall or other structure is in such a condition that it could present a danger to road users.

Where an owner/occupier does not comply with the requirements of the notice, or cannot be identified, Roads Service may carry out the necessary remedial works to ensure the safety of road users and will seek to recover the costs, where possible.

In an attempt to address the issue of vacancy/dereliction, I am considering the setting up of an inter-departmental group, to focus on prioritising and agreeing actions to enhance and improve the physical environment and image of many of our settlements.

I am also considering a pilot working arrangement in advance of RPA, to bring together the functions of economic development, planning, regeneration and local roads to work on practical solutions with a focus on place making.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment what additional measures will be necessary to meet the new 35 percent reduction target in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020, as outlined in the Draft Programme for Government.
(AQW 4795/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The 35% target is in the draft PfG. I intend to consult in a dedicated way with external groups, to make a further decision on "stretching" the 35%. That said, the Draft Programme for Government 2011-15 commits Northern Ireland to continue to work towards a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by at least 35% on 1990 levels by 2025.1 The latest annual projection figure (based on 2008 data) indicates that Northern Ireland emissions in 2025 are likely to reduce by 33% compared with the baseline (1990).2 This lends weight to the argument for a more challenging target. The Northern Ireland Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Action Plan published in February 2011 sets out the existing measures that are considered likely to achieve this level of reduction.

It is the role of the Cross Departmental Working Group on Climate Change, which I chair, to monitor progress against the activities contained in the Action Plan and take steps to agree amendments, if appropriate, on the basis of the annual projection figure to ensure that we remain on a trajectory to meet the Programme for Government target.

However, there is more to do. The Committee on Climate Change provided advice to me recently that suggested there is potential for further reductions, particularly in transport, agriculture and residential emissions. It is my view that climate change legislation can help deliver further reductions and contribute to greater certainty on progress towards achieving our target for greenhouse gas emission reductions. I shall be urging the Executive to put challenging environmental targets on the face of a climate Bill.

A37, Broad Road: Human Waste Sludge Site

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the circumstances which led to the implementation of enforcement processes at the human waste sludge site on the A37 Broad Road, Limavady, in April 2011.
(AQW 5017/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency has granted a mobile plant licence to a company to permit the storage and treatment of sewage sludge in an old quarry alongside the A37 Limavady to Coleraine Road.

The licence includes a range of conditions to ensure the sludge is managed properly and fully complies with waste legislation. The licence also includes a Site Specific Working Plan.

The company was issued with a Statutory Notice on 8 April 2011 to remedy breaches of the Site Specific Working Plan , relating to odour, mud on the road and the quantity of material treated at the site. These breaches had been substantiated by the Waste Licencing Section in NIEA as a result of a site inspection.

The Notice required the company to comply with the Plan and only treat a maximum of 250 tonnes of sludge per day.

As Minister, I am determined to put in place and have demonstrated a rigorous enforcement regime. I believe this is an essential element of good planning and enforcement and plan to roll out a number of interventions in this regard.

Listed Buildings: Double Glazed Windows

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the total number of (i) successful applications; and (ii) unsuccessful applications for the installation of double glazed windows in listed buildings in each of the last five years.
(AQW 5023/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The installation of double glazing in listed buildings in all cases requires Listed Building Consent. The Department does not hold information in relation to the number of applications which specifically relate to or include the installation of double glazed windows; to identify such cases would require a manual search of files for Listed Building Consent. This is disproportionate in terms of time and costs and would result in unvalidated statistics being released.

1 http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/index/programme-for-government-and-budget-v1.htm
2 http://www.doeni.gov.uk/northern_ireland_action_plan_on_greenhouse_gas_emissions_reductions.pdf

The following table shows the numbers of applications for Listed Building Consent as published in the Department's Annual Publications Table 1. The figures do not correlate to the number of 'live' applications under consideration for each of the last 3 business years – I regret I have only information for the last 3 years - but only to the numbers of cases received, decided, approved or withdrawn within each business year.

Listed Building Consent Applications

	Received	Decided	Approved	Withdrawn
08/09	299	322	307	24
09/10	282	276	262	26
10/11	263	271	245	13

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the additional measures which are necessary to meet the new target of a 35 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020, as outlined in the Programme for Government.
(AQW 5037/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Draft Programme for Government 2011-15 commits Northern Ireland to continue to work towards a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by at least 35% on 1990 levels by 2025.3 The latest annual projection figure (based on 2008 data) indicates that Northern Ireland emissions in 2025 are likely to reduce by 33% compared with the baseline (1990).4 The Northern Ireland Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Action Plan published in February 2011 sets out the existing measures that are considered likely to achieve this level of reduction. In these circumstances, a 35% rate is well within our reach. Indeed, it may prove the case that the PFG should be amended after consultation to achieve a more robust target.

It is the role of the Cross Departmental Working Group (CDWG) on Climate Change, which I chair, to monitor progress against the activities contained in the Action Plan which is also reviewed and updated annually. The CDWG will take steps to agree amendments to the measures in the Action Plan, if appropriate, on the basis of the annual projection figure to ensure that we remain on a trajectory to meet the Executive's Programme for Government target.

However, I believe that there is more to do. The Committee on Climate Change provided advice to me recently that confirms there is potential for further reductions, particularly in transport, agriculture and residential emissions. I will therefore continue to challenge all in government to do more. My view is that we should use all the robust and expert evidence at our disposal to set climate change targets which are rigorous and challenging. I believe new local climate change legislation can help deliver further reductions and contribute to greater certainty on progress towards achieving our target for greenhouse gas emission reductions.

MOT Expiration and Vehicle Tax Expiration: Reminder Letters

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment how much his Department has spent on sending reminder letters for (i) MOT expiration; and (ii) Vehicle Tax expiration in each of the last five years.
(AQW 5124/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

(i) In relation to MOT reminders the costs for sending reminders in each of the last 5 years is as follows:

Financial Year	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Cost	£156,880	£166,687	£169,127	£195,456	£209,056

Figures include the cost of printing and producing the reminder letter and associated postage costs.

The principle of issuing reminders is not being reviewed at present primarily since it is considered to have contributed to the reduction in MOT non-compliance from over 28% in 2002 to under 5% currently and since the concomitant increase in demand for testing has enabled the efficiency of the service to be improved progressively and enabled the test fee to be retained at its current level since 1 October 2005.

As reported separately, however, the question of whether reminders should be issued by post, by email or by SMS is currently under active consideration in the context of a wide range of relevant factors including the implications of any changes for costs, the accuracy of records, compliance and customer satisfaction.

(ii) In relation to vehicle tax reminders, vehicle licensing is an excepted matter that is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Transport, but it is administered in NI by the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) under an agreement between the Department and the Department for Transport (DfT).

The policy in relation to reminder notices is set by DfT and its agency, DVLA and the costs are met in full by DVLA.

3 http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/index/programme-for-government-and-budget-v1.htm
4 http://www.doeni.gov.uk/northern_ireland_action_plan_on_greenhouse_gas_emissions_reductions.pdf

DVA is unable to provide information on the costs associated with the issue of reminders for the period since May 2010 as from this date the bulk printing service is provided by DVLA through it's in-house printing unit.

Additionally for the period 2006 to April 2010, DVA are unable to provide the bulk printing costs associated with the printing of reminders as during this period Fujitsu Services Ltd provided DVA with a range of bulk printing services under a managed service maintenance and support contract, the Bulk Printing charges were not broken down into the individual items of printing. However, DVA are able to provide volumes of reminders issued in this period as well as the associated stationery and postage costs.

Financial Year	Cost	Volumes
2006/07	£215,340	1,119,166
2007/08	£232,527	1,174,613
2008/09	£255,790	1,232,967
2009/10	£273,694	1,277,498
2010/11	£41,920*	111,393*

* Relates to April 2010 only, as from May 2010 all printing and dispatch was carried out by DVLA

MOT Expiration and Vehicle Tax Expiration: SMS Reminder Scheme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department has considered the introduction of an SMS reminder scheme for (i) MOT expiration; and (ii) Vehicle Tax expiration.
(AQW 5125/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In relation to MOT expiration, the Driver and Vehicle Agency has and continues to consider the merits of issuing reminders by SMS. It is, however, recognised that the collection and maintenance of up-to-date information particularly mobile telephone numbers could be significant.

In relation to vehicle tax, vehicle licensing is an excepted matter which is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Transport, but it is administered in NI by the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) under an agreement between the Department and the Department for Transport. The provision of services to NI customers is a policy matter for DVLA (Swansea), however they do not currently offer this service in Britain. I am advised that DVLA (Swansea) do review enhancements to customer service as technology develops and I am advised that any future proposals will consider how those services can be extended to NI.

Article 31 Planning Decisions

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how many Article 31 planning decisions have been issued in (i) 2008; (ii) 2009; (iii) 2010; and (iv) 1 January 2011 to 5 May 2011.
(AQW 5319/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The number of Article 31 planning decisions issued is available on a financial year basis and is detailed below.

1 April 2008 - 31 March 2009	1 April 2009 – 31 March 2010	1 April 2010 – 31 March 2011	1 April 2011 – 5 May 2011
26	10	27	2

Planning Forum

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to the Planning Forum, to detail (i) the membership; (ii) the terms of reference; (iii) the date of each meeting to date; and (iv.) when and where the minutes of each meeting are published.
(AQW 5501/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

(i) The membership of the Forum is attached at Annex A.

(ii) The terms of reference for the Forum are attached at Annex B.

(iii) Meetings have taken place on 12th January 2011, 29th June 2011, 21st September 2011 and 7th December 2011.

(iv) The minutes of Forum meetings are issued to members of the Forum and published as news items on the Planning website.

(v) There are 4 sub-groups of the Planning Forum and detail of the membership, purpose, work to date, date of meetings and outcomes so far is included in Annex C.

Annex A

Planning Forum Members

No.	Name & Position	Organisation
1	Michael Worthington (Member of CBI & Managing Director of Pragma Planning & Development Consultants)	CBI
2	Brett Hannam (Chief Operating Officer and interim CEO of SIB)	SIB
3	Nigel Lucas – had been John Armstrong (Deputy Secretary)	CEF
4	Richard Hunter (Member of IoD Northern Ireland Division and Director of R. Robinson & Sons Architects)	IoD
5	Ald. Jim Dillon (Chair of NILGA's Planning Working Group)	NILGA
6	Derek McCallan (Chief Executive)	NILGA
7	Sue Christie (Director)	NIEL
8	Eamonn McMullan (Martin McDonald retiring as Chief Executive)	Rural Development Council
9	Diana Thompson (Chair of RTPI NI and an Associate at Michael Burroughs Associates)	RTPI
10	Nuala O'Neill (RICS Public Policy Executive) or Diana Fitzsimons (RICS Planning spokesperson)	RICS
11	Norman Hutchinson (President)	RSUA
12	Dr. Jennifer Donald – had been Grainia Long (Policy & Public Affairs Officer)	Chartered Institute of Housing
13	Prof. Greg Lloyd (Head of School of the Built Environment)	UUJ
14	Dr. Stephen McKay (Senior lecturer at School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering [SPACE])	QUB
15	Una McKernan - had been Seamus McAleavey (Deputy Chief Executive)	NICVA
16	Paul McTernan (Chairman of IPI Northern Branch and Technical Director of SLR Consulting Ltd)	Irish Planning Institute
17	Henry Johnston (Director of the Urban Regeneration Strategy Directorate)	DSD
18	Graeme Hutchinson (Director of Strategic Planning Economics and Statistics Division)	DETI
19	Steve Chambers (Head of Property Solutions Unit)	Invest NI
20	Glyn Roberts (Chief Executive) or Des Stephens (Planning Consultant)	NIIRTA
21	Colm Bradley (Director)	Community Places
22	Michael Hegarty (Director)	PLACE
23	Rita Harkin (Research Officer)	Ulster Architectural Heritage Society (UAHS)
24	Dr. Brendan Murtagh (Reader at School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering [SPACE])	QUB
25	Prof. Michael McGarry (Lecturer at the School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering [SPACE])	QUB
26	Claire Ferry (Senior Conservation Officer)	RSPB

Annex B

Terms of Reference for Planning Forum

- To enable engagement with key stakeholders, professional bodies, the universities and other Departments on fundamental planning issues in a systematic and planned way.

Annex C

Planning Forum Sub Groups

GROUP 1 – The Planning Reform Bill	**Chair: Maggie Smith**
Aim 1: To advise on whether the proposals for the new Planning Reform Bill are sufficient/establish if further provision is required Aim 2: To examine the potential for Reforms in the Planning Act to be introduced on a voluntary basis in advance of/preparation for the transfer of planning functions [emphasis on Planning Performance Agreements, Pre Application Discussions, etc.]	Members: Maggie Smith (DOE - PPD) Irene Kennedy (DOE – PPD) Michael Hegarty (PLACE) Ken Sterrett (QUB) Colm Bradley (Community Places)

GROUP 2 – Streamlining	**Chair: Fiona McCandless**
Aim: To advise on ways to improve the current system including the option of extending the range and type of planning applications which could be streamlined	Members: Fiona McCandless (DOE - LPD) Nigel Lucas (CEF) Michael Worthington (CBI) Ian Wilson (NILGA - Lisburn City Council) Claire Ferry (RSPB)

GROUP 3 – Planning & the Economy	**Chair: Mary MacIntyre**
Aim: To examine practical ways of improving planning performance with a particular focus on strategic/specialist applications	Members: Mary MacIntyre (DOE - SPD) Chris Carvill (The Carvill Group) Sue Christie (NIEL) Brendan Murtagh (QUB) Ann McGregor (Chamber of Commerce) Eddie Nicell (Cara Development Ltd) Nigel Lucas (CEF)

GROUP 4 – Renewables	**Chair: Mary MacIntyre**
Aim: To look at peat, single wind turbines, windfarms and offshore renewables in the context of planning applications and licensing; along with resources and structures for dealing with such proposals	Members: Graham Seymour (DOE - NIEA) Susanna Allen (NIEA) Michael Gordon (Turley Associates) Simon Kirk (SPD) Anthony McKay (SPD) Michael Harper (B9 energy) Gordon Kyle (SSE Renewables) Paul Carson (Simple Power) Lucy Whitford (Renewable Energy Systems Ltd)

Issues Being Addressed – Planning Reform Bill – group met on 28 September 2011

- Statement of community involvement;
- New Development Plan System;
- Conservation Areas;
- Funding to Non-Profit Organisations;
- Sustainable Development;
- Development Plans.

Issues Being Addressed – Streamlining – group met on 3 October 2011

- Way Forward – a number of options such as:
  - a All applications to be included except Article 31 strategic applications;
  - b Refusals also to be streamlined;
  - c Applications with up to 5 objections should remain streamlined;
  - d An extension of the categories of applications included in the current agreed extended scheme.

- Option (d) above represented the best way forward and as an interim measure all minor and intermediate applications should be included in the streamlined scheme.
- Agreement was also reached that major applications for housing development up to a maximum of 25 houses should also be included plus office accommodation up to a maximum of 200 sq m. This would result in about 75% of all applications being streamlined.

Issues Being Addressed – Renewables – group met on 3 October 2011

- Marine Renewables – Streamlining of consenting;
- Wind Farms;
- Single Turbines;
- Planning Fees;
- Communication.

Issues Being Addressed – Planning and the Economy – group met on 11 October 2011

- Pre-application Discussions (PADs) – undertake further work in conjunction with CEF to improve the PADs process;
- Time-bound consultations would make a big difference to applicants provided the consultation response was substantive and any information requested was proportionate to the proposal;
- There is a perception of inconsistency in the standard of service and decision making between different offices; and
- The current arrangements for telephone calls through NI Direct are unsatisfactory.
- The Group agreed to undertake further work in conjunction with CEF to improve the pre-application process and to undertake relevant training to enhance case officer's understanding of the economics of development and to improve consistency in decision making.

Recyclable Material Collected in Each Council Area

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the amount of recyclable material collected in each council area in each of the last 12 months.
(AQW 5612/11-15)

Mr Attwood: It is not possible to detail the amount of all recyclable material collected (i.e. municipal and non- municipal waste) in each council area as the data available for non-municipal collected materials cannot distinguish between those materials collected for recycling and those for recovery.

It is however possible to provide the amount and nature of recyclable material collected by each council at the kerbside, civic amenity sites and at "bring banks" during the period April 2010 to March 2011, which is the latest period for which final validated figures are available, see 'Table 8' below (Table 8a classifies further the 'other waste' material types collected at these sites). It is not possible for the Department to break down these annual totals on a monthly basis, as the vast majority of District Councils do not enter data on a monthly basis.

The source of the data in both Table 8 and Table 8a is the Northern Ireland Municipal Waste Management Statistics 2010/11 Annual Report Appendix published 8/12/2011 which is available via the web link below.

It should be noted that:

a Table 8 does not include the amount of recycled materials which came from residual (i.e. non-source segregated) wastes (e.g. household black bag waste) as these wastes were not collected with the intention of recycling but rather for disposal.

b Further Table 8 does not take account of material collected by the council but then subsequently rejected for example by material recovery facilities.

The Northern Ireland Municipal Waste Management Statistics Annual Report 2010/11 and its associated Appendix provide further information (including some historical trends) which may be of use and are available via the links below:

http://www.doeni.gov.uk/waste_2011.pdf

http://www.doeni.gov.uk/waste_2011_appendix.xls

Further information relating to waste reporting and councils is also available via the link below:

http://www.doeni.uk/niea/waste-home/municipal_data_reporting.htm

Table 8: Material types collected for recycling (inc composting) at kerbside, civic amenity sites and bring sites in Northern Ireland, 2010/11 units are Tonnes

Council (alphabetically within each of the 3 Waste Management Groups)	Glass	Metal	Paper	Plastic	Compostable (excluding all wood)	WEEE	'Other waste' collected	All recycled materials collected
Antrim	450	565	2,163	211	7,529	544	5,664	17,124
Ards	1,079	814	3,632	377	8,366	684	1,876	16,828
Ballymena	1,050	346	2,379	269	5,068	314	1,717	11,143
Belfast	2,847	1,775	10,779	1,135	14,707	1,631	4,362	37,236
Carrickfergus	896	325	1,292	215	4,117	282	2,573	9,701
Castlereagh	1,263	457	2,796	374	6,385	429	1,420	13,125
Down	955	474	2,839	290	4,151	535	862	10,106
Larne	474	349	1,721	163	3,664	335	1,003	7,709
Lisburn	840	804	5,093	517	11,760	978	4,085	24,075
Newtownabbey	2,002	666	3,231	524	9,793	689	1,352	18,256
North Down	1,204	813	4,002	401	8,833	748	4,495	20,496
Ballymoney	248	234	1,329	179	2,193	212	649	5,045
Coleraine	735	448	2,742	349	4,542	476	1,566	10,857
Derry	1,226	864	4,783	624	1,764	784	2,820	12,866
Limavady	335	160	1,948	342	1,748	155	515	5,201
Magherafelt	336	333	2,199	300	5,655	300	2,028	11,152
Moyle	178	97	765	111	692	82	218	2,142
Strabane	527	328	1,889	250	929	180	809	4,912
Armagh	1,199	438	2,176	344	4,921	328	2,473	11,881
Banbridge	1,206	407	1,922	252	8,500	427	1,949	14,663
Cookstown	375	240	2,040	316	3,146	242	1,733	8,093
Craigavon	748	672	4,894	453	7,155	801	1,861	16,583
Dungannon	413	342	2,998	472	4,983	407	1,312	10,927
Fermanagh	1,108	587	3,698	996	2,764	474	1,883	11,510
Newry & Mourne	1,010	564	5,078	469	5,028	666	2,138	14,954
Omagh	552	434	2,876	443	3,612	431	1,782	10,130
Northern Ireland	**23,256**	**13,535**	**81,266**	**10,375**	**142,005**	**13,133**	**53,145**	**336,715**

Totals are calculated on exact figures and then rounded to the nearest tonne. Thus they may not always exactly agree with similarly rounded individual council tonnages above.

Table 8a: 'Other waste' material types collected for recycling (inc composting) at kerbside, civic amenity site and bring sites in Northern Ireland, 2010/11 units are Tonnes

Council (alphabetically within each of the 3 Waste Management Groups)	Batteries	Oil	Paint	Rubble	Textile	Wood	Un-classified	All 'other waste' collected
Antrim	3	19	53	3,564	92	1,933	0	5,664
Ards	19	35	35	0	83	1,703	0	1,876
Ballymena	6	33	11	1,071	73	524	0	1,717
Belfast	36	25	143	102	449	3,576	30	4,362
Carrickfergus	2	16	21	1,680	61	769	24	2,573
Castlereagh	14	11	42	782	105	457	10	1,420
Down	8	12	32	0	101	706	2	862
Larne	11	14	6	214	68	681	8	1,003
Lisburn	23	10	59	2,337	135	1,497	24	4,085
Newtownabbey	22	15	52	44	112	1,106	0	1,352
North Down	26	15	74	2,731	89	1,561	0	4,495
Ballymoney	6	9	15	326	46	113	134	649
Coleraine	5	19	38	218	82	944	260	1,566
Derry	13	30	134	955	113	981	594	2,820
Limavady	0	10	17	0	64	276	148	515
Magherafelt	4	14	20	1,104	68	602	217	2,028
Moyle	2	3	8	9	38	71	87	218
Strabane	5	5	27	13	47	526	187	809
Armagh	7	18	20	1,460	106	862	0	2,473
Banbridge	11	17	0	1,455	159	260	46	1,949
Cookstown	3	18	16	803	114	619	161	1,733
Craigavon	16	36	71	0	136	1,056	546	1,861
Dungannon	6	20	0	14	113	922	237	1,312
Fermanagh	8	23	53	14	156	1,322	307	1,883
Newry & Mourne	7	13	30	8	212	1,191	676	2,138
Omagh	11	30	54	449	97	931	210	1,782
Northern Ireland	**276**	**470**	**1,031**	**19,353**	**2,919**	**25,189**	**3,907**	**53,145**

Totals are calculated on exact figures and then rounded to the nearest tonne. Thus they may not always exactly agree with similarly rounded individual council tonnages above.

Local Government: Historic Debt

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department intends to take to address the differential in the historic debt between some district councils, ahead of the Review of Public Administration.
(AQW 5675/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I attach a schedule which outlines the current historic debt levels in all 26 Councils and the particular figures between Councils that will be merged under the Executive's 11 model. Of course, under the 15 model, six councils would not be

subject to merge and the debt issue would not arise. The 11 model makes the debt issue more difficult than would be the case under a higher number.

This issue will however need to be addressed in the consideration of a number of complex aspects of council finances and will pose a significant challenge to councils and government in the run up to the creation of the new councils.

SCHEDULE 1 Total Council debt as of 30 November 2011

Council	Total	11 Model Structure
Antrim	15,182,481	61,225,928
Newtownabbey	46,043,447	
Ards	13,971,249	42,420,381
North Down	28,449,132	
Armagh	27,605,117	56,261,226
Banbridge	20,663,518	
Craigavon	7,992,591	
Ballymena	24,436,386	60,133,653
Carrickfergus	21,469,985	
Larne	14,227,282	
Ballymoney	9,454,077	59,113,760
Coleraine	28,508,954	
Limavady	12,395,920	
Moyle	8,754,809	
Cookstown	1,487,123	4,968,563
Dungannon	3,481,440	
Magherafelt	0	
Castlereagh *	18,612,585	37,138,466
Lisburn	18,525,881	
Derry	26,149,594	28,459,326
Strabane	2,309,732	
Down	23,928,145	42,728,419
Newry & Mourne	18,800,274	
Fermanagh	3,505,713	13,719,690
Omagh	10,213,977	
Belfast	25,852,530	25,852,530
Total	**432,021,942**	

* Certain areas of Castlereagh Borough Council will merge with Belfast City Council under the proposed 11 model structure.

Fixed Penalty Fines

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of fixed penalty fines that have been imposed since February 2011, broken down by (i) company; and (ii) the reason for the fine.
(AQW 5831/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) has primary responsibility for the licensing and enforcement of heavy goods vehicles and passenger carrying vehicles. The table below details the number of fixed penalty tickets issued by the DVA per offence and type of vehicle under the graduated fixed penalty scheme from its introduction in March 2011 up to 15 December 2011. A fixed penalty ticket is issued not to the company but to the driver of the vehicle at the time of detection of the offence.

In preparation for the implementation of taxi operator licensing, however, new data capture arrangements are being developed for use at the roadside. They will enable all offences committed by taxi drivers to be linked directly to the holders of operator licences.

The Agency has recently introduced new procedures that directly link fixed penalty tickets to licensed goods vehicle and bus operators and these, in addition to convictions and any other relevant data available, are now taken into consideration for operator licensing suspension and revocation purposes.

	Number of Fixed Penalty Notices Issued				
Nature of Offence	**Goods Vehicle**	**Coach Bus Minibus**	**Taxi**	**Car**	**Total**
Defective exhaust and silencer system			1		1
Defective lights			2	1	3
Defective tyre	2		38	1	41
Driving with, causing or permitting no insurance		1	6		7
Exceeding driving periods	1				1
Excess axle weight	7				7
Excess weight	71				71
Failing to keep tachograph record sheets in clean condition		1			1
Failing to operate switch mechanisms to tachograph	3	3			6
Failing to take daily rest period	1	1			2
Failing to wear taxi driver's badge			25		25
No goods vehicle test certificate	3				3
No PSV licence		1	81		82
No taxi roof sign			8		8
No vehicle test certificate (MOT)	1			5	6
Overcrowding on PSV			3		3
Using goods vehicle in dangerous condition	1				1
Totals	**90**	**7**	**164**	**7**	**268**
Overall Total					**268**

Community Planning Legislation for Local Councils

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will introduce community planning legislation for local councils in advance of the reform of local government structures.
(AQW 5857/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The current position on the reform of local government is reflected in the draft Programme for Government 2011-15, published for public consultation on 17th November 2011.

I intend to progress work on Local Government Reform across its varied and complex stages on this basis. I will, however, continue to press my argument for 15 Councils on the grounds of good government and good politics.

Consultation on the draft document ends on 22nd February 2012 and the views expressed on the proposals will then be carefully assessed.

I will then be in a position to consider the way forward with Ministerial colleagues. I will run a series of pilots to help Councils prepare for the transfer but I do not intend at this time to bring forward the proposal you outline.

Car Insurance

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of the report published by the Office of Fair Trading into the cost of car insurance in Northern Ireland, what steps his Department intends to take to address the higher cost of car insurance in Northern Ireland compared with Britain.
(AQW 5941/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am keen to work with the insurance industry to identify how issues in relation to the cost of motor insurance in Northern Ireland can best be addressed and shall meet with representatives of the Association of British Insurers on 18 January 2012 to discuss road safety matters and motor insurance costs, particularly in relation to young drivers.

There are a number of practical measures under consideration in the Department to improve road safety which could, potentially, indirectly impact on the cost of motor insurance for young and other novice drivers. I am considering, for example, the outcome of a consultation carried out earlier this year on reforming our Learner and Restricted Driver Schemes and the possibility of introducing a system of Graduated Driver Licensing. Measures under review include:

- raising or removing the 45 mph restriction for learners and restricted drivers;
- allowing learners to take lessons on motorways;
- requiring learner drivers to undergo a minimum learning period;
- revising the practical driving test to make it more representative of 'real life' driving conditions; and
- increasing the duration of the restricted period.

Departmental officials have also been exploring with the local motor insurance industry representatives the potential availability in Northern Ireland of young driver 'Pay How You Drive' insurance products linked to in-car technology capable of monitoring driving performance.

I would also wish to highlight the Department's plans to bring forward legislation to lower the BAC limit from 80mg/100ml of blood to 20mg/100ml for new drivers in the first two years post test.

In all of these ways and others, I am attempting to bear down on car insurance costs.

Prosecutions for Driving Without an MOT Certificate

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of prosecutions for driving without an MOT certificate in each of the last five years.
(AQW 5946/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The enforcement of MOT compliance has historically been carried out by the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and the Driver & Vehicle Agency has no relevant data for the last five years. The information has been requested and will be provided in due course.

The new graduated fixed penalty scheme, which was introduced in March 2011, enables DVA enforcement officers to issue fixed penalty tickets for a wide range of road traffic offences, and since 1 March 2011 DVA staff have issued five £60 fixed penalty notices to drivers of private cars where no valid MOT certificates were in force.

Local Councils: Cost of Recruiting Chief Executives and Directors/Heads of Service

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the cost of recruiting Chief Executives and Directors/Heads of Service for local councils in each of the last two years.
(AQW 6013/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The cost of recruiting Chief Executives and Directors for the 26 District Councils during 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 is provided in the attached table.

AQW 6013/11-15

Council	Chief Exc Recruitment 2009/2010 (i)	Chief Exc Recruitment 2010/2011 (ii)	Director/Head of Service Recruitment 2009/2010 (iii)	Director/Head of Service Recruitment 2010/2011 (iv)
Antrim	0	0	0	0
Ards	0	0	0	0
Armagh	0	0	0	0
Ballymena	0	0	0	0
Ballymoney	0	0	0	9,794
Banbridge	0	0	0	0

Council	Chief Exc Recruitment 2009/2010 (i)	Chief Exc Recruitment 2010/2011 (ii)	Director/Head of Service Recruitment 2009/2010 (iii)	Director/Head of Service Recruitment 2010/2011 (iv)
Belfast	0	0	16,182	7,085
Carrickfergus	0	0	0	0
Castlereagh	0	18,778	0	0
Coleraine	0	0	0	3,349
Cookstown	0	0	0	0
Craigavon	0	25,209	0	18,150
Derry	0	11,686	3,382	14,115
Down	4,504	0	18,847	15,408
Dungannon	0	0	0	0
Fermanagh	2,582	4,889	0	0
Larne	0	0	0	0
Limavady	0	0	0	0
Lisburn	0	0	0	10,639
Magherafelt	0	0	0	0
Moyle	0	0	0	0
Newry & Mourne	0	0	0	0
Newtownabbey	0	6,900	0	5,950
North Down	0	0	0	15,164
Omagh	0	0	0	0
Strabane	0	0	0	0
Total	**7,086**	**67,462**	**38,411**	**99,654**

Strategic Flood Map

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment what protection, from flood damage and house depreciation, his Department will offer to householders and business owners in the flood plain areas in the Strategic Flood Map, given that his Department was responsible for granting planning permission in those areas.
(AQW 6017/11-15)

Mr Attwood: All relevant planning applications are determined with reference to the Strategic Flood Map for Northern Ireland which was developed by DARD Rivers Agency in consultation with planning officials.

The Department's current policy for the protection of houses and businesses from flood risk is set out in PPS 15: Planning and Flood Risk. Where appropriate, mitigation measures may be required and on occasions permission may be refused where new development within a flood plain would result in a significant flood risk. However, historically many cities and towns in Northern Ireland, as elsewhere in the UK, have been built in flood plains in advance of the introduction of PPS 15 in June 2006.

PPS15 is currently being reviewed to put greater emphasis on flooding from all sources including surface water rather than focusing on flooding from rivers and the sea.

However, the planning system cannot in itself prevent the flooding of properties but it does have a key role to ensure that the development decisions we make today and in the future does not increase flood risk.

It is the responsibility of the applicant to identify potential flood risk as early in the development process as possible and demonstrate how the development can be made safe through design and flood resilient construction and that it does not increase flood risk elsewhere. The Department's responsibility in respect of flooding does not affect the liability position of developers or owners.

Strategic Flood Map

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment how his Department plans to use the Strategic Flood Map when implementing planning policy.
(AQW 6020/11-15)

Mr Attwood: All relevant planning applications are determined with reference to the Strategic Flood Map for Northern Ireland which was developed by DARD Rivers Agency in consultation with planning officials.

DARD Rivers Agency is normally consulted by my Department for advice on applications within flood plains identified on the Strategic Flood Map in accordance with PPS 15 – Planning and Flood Risks. Where appropriate, mitigation measures may be required and on occasions permission may be refused where new development within a flood plain would result in a significant flood risk.

PPS15 is currently being reviewed to put greater emphasis on flooding from all sources including surface water rather than focusing on flooding from rivers and the sea.

It should be noted that it is the responsibility of the applicant to identify potential flood risk as early in the development process as possible and demonstrate how the development can be made safe through design and flood resilient construction and that it does not increase flood risk elsewhere. The Department's responsibility in respect of flooding does not affect the liability position of developers or owners.

Wind Turbines

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department has any evidence of the health impact of wind turbines that are located close to houses.
(AQW 6078/11-15)

Mr Attwood: To date my Department has received no evidence linking the erection of wind turbines to impacts on the health of people living in the vicinity of wind turbines.

Late Nights Flights Clause

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 4488/11-15, whether he is aware that his definition of 'extraordinary circumstances' contradicts a European court ruling which states that technical or maintenance issues are not to be considered 'extraordinary circumstances' unless they arise from an exceptional event beyond the control of the airline.
(AQW 6094/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The obligation in the existing Planning Agreement between the Department and George Best Belfast City Airport states that only in "exceptional circumstances" can delayed aircraft use the Airport during the extended hours (between 9.31 pm and 11.59 pm local time).

I have not purported to define "exceptional circumstances". The Department has construed and will continue to construe the term "exceptional circumstances" by reference to the applicable planning context and particular circumstances.

There was an EU court ruling in relation to air passenger compensation for cancelled/delayed flights and addressed the question of "extraordinary" circumstances. This is different from the "exceptional" circumstances for the purpose of the Article 40 agreement referred to above.

Horse Mussel Beds in Strangford Lough

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the meetings which he, or his Department, has had with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to the protection and restoration of the horse mussel beds in Strangford Lough since May 2011.
(AQW 6250/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Meetings between DOE officials and DARD officials to discuss horse mussel beds took place on 16 June, 12 September, 25 November and 12 December 2011 with a representative of the fishing industry also present at the meeting on the 12 December. In addition, I met with the DARD Minister on two occasions on 21 July 2011 and 9 January 2012. The discussions at these meetings focussed on proposals for further restrictions to protect remaining Modiolus reefs.

Local Government Reform

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment to outline how he is engaging with his Executive colleagues on the issue of Local Government Reform.
(AQO 1054/11-15)

Mr Attwood: This is a major policy, government and community issue. It offers a once in a political lifetime opportunity to remodel local government in a far better image.

The Executive decided on 16 November 2011 to opt for an 11 council model. The Executive did not discuss the issue at length, did not agree to my proposal to take 'a little time' and a half day to interrogate our choices, did not review the savings potential created by the Council/Solace proposal of August 2011, savings of up to £570 million over 25 year period (etc).

I have to believe that good government and best advice will prevail, that fresh thinking will emerge on this issue, that the cost, identity, logistical and other arguments which favour a 15 model will be embraced.

I have requested my officials to take forward the Executive decision. This is still an enormous undertaking, complex, with many diversions and challenges. As of 16 January 2012, I have met DSD, DETI, and DRD Ministers around powers to be transferred.

Anaerobic Digesters: Planning Applications

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications for anaerobic digesters are under consideration.
(AQO 1055/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As of 10 January 2012, 73 applications for anaerobic digesters are under consideration. This is an emerging renewable and economic opportunity, with a total of 20 decisions to date with six more imminent. I am meeting with officials this week to identify how planning can better manage AD applications, in relation to noise/odour issues, capacity in the planning system and technology issues in order to enable the proper and prompt processing of AD applications.

Planning: Runkerry, Bushmills

Mr Storey asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the reasons for the delay in announcing his decision on the proposed Runkerry development in Bushmills.
(AQO 1056/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The planning application for a Golf Resort, Hotel and 75 Guest Suites was submitted in February 2007. There is no doubt that the application has suffered from significant delay. In September 2011, I instructed planning officials to bring forward papers on the application by the end of November. It was my view that all issues around this application had been or were being exhaustively interrogated and it was time to make a decision.

Unfortunately during a final round of consultation, an issue was raised in relation to the impact of a proposal on a listed wall and railings at the proposed entrance to the development on Whitepark Road. This necessitated the submission of additional plans, further Environmental Information and a non technical summary as required by the EIA Regulations. This information has now been received and the application was re-advertised in the local press during the first week in January.

In order to prevent any further delay, I have stated my intention to make a decision on this planning application as expeditiously as possible following the expiry of the statutory 4 week period for public representation.

Climate Change Bill

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of the Environment when he will introduce a Climate Change Bill.
(AQO 1057/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I intend bringing forward a Climate Change Bill in the course of the current Assembly. I have indicated this to my Ministerial colleagues in a memo on 24 December 2011.

In doing so I took account of the advice of the independent Committee on Climate Change. The Committee has stated that, from its experience in Whitehall, legislation is crucial in three regards:

- it has ensured targets have been set through a transparent evidence-based and analytically robust process;
- it has integrated activity across Whitehall; and
- it has introduced a transparent monitoring process in relation to the targets set.

This has confirmed my commitment to climate change legislation. Establishing a target in legislation will help contribute to our economic recovery by supporting the transformation to a low carbon green economy, encouraging innovation while at the same time providing greater certainty for business and assisting job creation.

Planning: Complaints

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of how the new streamlined complaints procedure will impact on the planning system.
(AQO 1058/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The new Planning complaints procedure is designed to make the process of complaining easier and more user-friendly for members of the public. The key change has been to reduce the number of stages in the process from three to two, the first stage being handled by the appropriate Area Manager and the second at Director level – this will significantly shorten the process and should lead to speedier resolutions of complaints. Another change is the requirement at Stage 1 for the complaint to be reviewed by a Planning Officer who is independent to the team which dealt with the related application, which will help to ensure objectivity.

I believe that these changes will make for a more customer-focused and streamlined procedure which will be easier and less frustrating for members of the public to navigate through. Any complainant who remains dissatisfied will, of course, retain the right to ask an MLA to take their complaint to the Assembly Ombudsman for investigation.

I will also consider if a further independent element is required, though a fully independent complaints system is not an option under consideration.

Scrap Metal

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the need to amend the Waste Management Licensing or Pollution Prevention Control regulations, which govern scrap metal dealer licences and permits, to assist the PSNI in identifying those who are inexplicably supplying scrap metal to dealers.
(AQO 1059/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The 'theft' element of this crime is for the Department of Justice to address. I am committed to ensuring that the Department of the Environment does all it can to prevent this serious criminal activity.

To that end, I have written to the Minister for Justice and, Department of the Environment and Department of Justice officials have met to determine how best to identify and co-ordinate activity to seek to combat this crime.

In the meantime, while waste legislation does already provide significant powers to allow the Department to assist the PSNI in dealing with serious crimes such as this, Department officials are reviewing existing legislation to see if it is necessary and possible for any further improvements to be made.

In addition, at an operational level, NIEA and PSNI officials are already working to combat this illegal activity. On 6 December, I launched the working partnership between NIEA's Environmental Crime Unit (ECU) and PSNI on environmental and heritage crime in Northern Ireland and metal theft has been identified as a key area.

Planning Applications: New Dwellings

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications have been received in the past twelve months for new dwellings, and how many have been refused.
(AQO 1060/11-15)

Mr Attwood: A total of 3,094 applications for new single dwellings were received in 2010/11. Of this, 378 were applications in urban areas and 2,716 were applications in rural areas.

The number of applications for new single dwellings which were refused in 2010/11 was 851. Of this, 47 were in urban areas and 804 were in rural areas.

All applications received in the year may not have had a decision issued within the same time period and applications decided in the year may not have been received in the same time period. Therefore direct comparisons between the figures can not be made.

This information is available on the Planning NI website under Planning Statistics Publications. The most recent information for a complete year is contained in the bulletin 'Annual Development Management Statistics (Northern Ireland) 2010/11', in particular tables 4 and 6.

Marine Environment

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment when he will introduce new legislation to protect the marine environment.
(AQO 1061/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I remain committed to introducing the Marine Bill (Northern Ireland) as soon as possible, subject to Executive approval.

As currently drafted, the legislation provides for marine spatial planning, for the streamlining of certain energy licences, and for conservation zones to help protect habitats and species. However, among other issues, I believe strongly that a Marine Management organisation is a necessary managerial model going forward. I hope Executive will also endorse this approach.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Government Buildings in Ballymena and Ballymoney

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to list the Government buildings in the (a) Ballymena; and (b) Ballymoney areas that are connected to gas.
(AQW 5685/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The Government buildings in the Ballymena area that are connected to gas are detailed below:

- Ballymena County Hall, Galgorm Road;
- Academy House, 121A Broughshane Street, Ballymena;
- 4 Parkway, Ballymena, Public Prosecution Service;
- Probation Board, 3 Wellington Court, Ballymena;
- Northern Trust Audly Terrace Community Social Services Centre, 27 Ballymoney Road;
- Northern Trust Cottage Hospital – Northern Trust HQ ,5 Greenmount Road;
- Northern Trust Ballymena Health Centre, Braid Valley 52 Cushendall Road;
- Northern Trust Braid Valley Hospital, as above;
- Northern Trust Finance Offices, as above;
- Northern Trust Management Accounts, as above;
- Northern Trust Salaries and Wages, as above;
- Northern Trust Slemish House, as above;
- Northern Trust Training Suite, as above;
- Northern Trust Spruce House, as above;
- Northern Trust George Sloan Centre, 35 Pennybridge Industrial Estate;
- Northern Trust Massereene Hospital Complex, Station Road;
- Northern Trust New Braid Valley Hospital, Cushendall Road;
- Northern Trust Raphael House, 11 Fenaghy Road Galgorm;
- Northern Trust Wilson House, 17 Raceview Road, Broughshane;
- Northern Regional College, Farm Lodge Building, Ballymena;
- Northern Regional College, Café Lamont, Trostan Avenue, Ballymena; and
- DVTA, Pennybridge Industrial Estate, Larne Road, Ballymena.

The Government buildings in the Ballymoney area that are connected to gas are detailed below:

- Northern Trust Acorn Business Centre, 2 Riada Avenue;
- Northern Trust Ballymoney Health Centre, 21B Newal Road;
- Northern Trust Child Adolescent Mental Health Services, 9-15 Newal Road; and
- Northern Trust Mental health Resource Centre, 17-19 Newal Road.

Government Buildings in Ballymena and Ballymoney

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to list the Government buildings in the (a) Ballymena; and (b) Ballymoney areas that are not connected to gas.
(AQW 5686/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Government buildings in the Ballymena area that are not connected to gas are detailed below:

- 62 Church Street, Ballymena;
- 48-50 Linenhall Street, Ballymena;
- 35-39 Bridge Street, Ballymena;
- Ballymena Court House, Albert Place;
- 7 Springwell Street, Ballymena;
- PSNI, 26 Galgorm Road, Ballymena;
- Northern Trust Adult centre , 23-25 Ballymoney Street;
- Northern Trust Area Stores, 21 Pennybridge Industrial Estate;
- Northern Trust Arran Garages 9 Arran Avenue Ballykeel;
- Northern Trust Ballee Children's Home, 5A Hollybank Park;
- Northern Trust Challenging Behaviour Team, 1 Castle Street;
- Northern Trust Community Addiction Team, 1 Parkmore Drive;
- Northern Trust Community Addictions Team, Lamont House 105A Railway Street;
- Northern Trust Cottagewood, Units 1-4 Cottagewood, High Street, Cushendall;
- Northern Trust Duriston House, Dunclug;
- Northern Trust Eco Centre, Kernohan's Lane, Broughshane Road;
- Northern Trust Glenlough Community Centre, 60 Croft Road, Carnlough;
- Northern Trust Glenmona Resource Centre, Glenmona Resource Centre, Cushendall;
- Northern Trust ICATS, 6 Garfield Place;
- Northern Trust Kintyre Hostel, 47-57 Kintyre Park, Ballykeel;
- Northern Trust Larne Road Doctor's Accommodation, Larne Road BT42 3AU;
- Northern Trust Loughlin School for Mental Handicap, Old Ballymoney Road BT43 6LX;
- Northern Trust Pinewood OPH & Social Services, 101 Frys Road;
- Northern Trust Portglenone Health Centre, 17 Townhill Road, Portglenone;
- Northern Trust Rockfield Medical Centre, Doury Road BT43 6JD;
- Northern Trust Salisbury House, Queen Street BT42 2BD;
- Northern Trust Conference Room, Larne Road Link, 80 Larne Road Link;
- NIFRS Ballymena District , First Floor Offices Salisbury Square;
- NIFRS Ballymena Fire Safety, 21 Henry Street;
- NIFRS Ballymena Fire Station, 22-26 Waveney Road;
- NIFRS Carnlough Fire Station Main Building, 14 Largy Road;
- NIFRS Fire Station Yard Area, 92 Newtownards Road,Carnlough;

- PCC, Broughshane Office Houston Mill, 10A Buckna Road, Broughshane;
- Ballymena Ambulance Station, Braid valley Hospital, Cushendall Road;
- Northern Regional College, Trostan Avenue Building, Ballymena;
- Ballymena Central Library, 5 Pat's Brae, Ballymena, BT43 5AX;
- Regional Administrative Centre, 25-31 Demesne Avenue, Ballymena,BT43 7BE;
- Broughshane Library, Main Street, Broughshane, BT42 4JW;
- Kells & Connor Library 5 Main Street, Kells, Ballymena, BT42 3JH;
- Portglenone Library 19 Townhill Road, Portglenone, BT44 8AD;
- Lockkeepers Cottage 153 Dunminning Road, Glarryford, Ballymena, BT44 9ET;
- Hill Farm , 62 Glenhead Road, Glenwherry, Skerrywhirry, Ballymena, BT42 4RF;
- Office, portacabin, store and visitors toilet block. Portglenone Forest – 69 Ballymena road BT44 0JJ;
- St. Patrick's Barracks, Demesne Avenue; and
- Regional Government Headquarters (decommissioned), Woodside Road Industrial Estate.

The Government buildings in the Ballymoney area that are not connected to gas are detailed below:

- Ballymoney Jobs and Benefits Office, 37-45 John Street;
- PSNI, 79 Charlotte Street, Ballymoney;
- Roads Depot, 190 Larne Road, Ballymena;
- NI Water Depot, Larne Road, Ballymena;
- Trillick House, 8 High Street, Ballymoney;
- Roads Depot, 28 Market Street, Ballymoney;
- NI Water Depot, Ballybrakes Road, Ballymoney;
- Northern Trust , 32 High Street;
- Northern Trust Ballymoney Adult Centre (Millbrook), 22 Frosses Road;
- Northern Trust Trust Headquarters, 8 Coleraine Road;
- Northern Trust Podiatry Dept & Training Centre ,21 Newal Road;
- Northern Trust Robinson Hospital Site: Speech & Language Therapy & Children's Services, 9 Newal Road;
- Northern Trust Robinson Hospital site: 9,11 & 13 Newal Road;
- Northern Trust Robinson Memorial Hospital 23 Newal Road;
- Northern Trust, Route Hospital, 8e Coleraine Road;
- Northern Trust, Unit 7 Ballybrakes Industrial Estate, BT53 6LW;
- Northern Trust, Unit 8 Ballybrakes Industrial Estate, BT53 6LW;
- NIFRS, Ballymoney Fire Station, 31 Market Street;
- NIFRS, Ballymoney Ambulance Station, The Bungalow, St James Road, BT53 6BJ;
- Northern Regional College, 2 Coleraine Road, Ballymoney;
- Ballymoney Library, Rodden Foot, Queen Street, Ballymoney, BT53 6JB;
- Movanagher Fish Farm, 152 Vow Road, Kilrea, Ballymoney, BT53 7NT; and
- Dwelling – Let, Craigs Forest -118 Mullan Road.

Civil Servants: Full-time Trade Union Officials

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many civil servants are currently paid from the public purse as full-time trade union officials.
(AQW 5792/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The number of civil servants that are currently paid for from the public purse as full-time trade union officials is 28.

Retail Levy

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on proposals for a large retail levy.
(AQO 1069/11-15)

Mr Wilson: On 15 December the Executive agreed the way forward on a range of measures aimed at rebalancing the rating system during a period of economic downturn through to recovery. This includes the introduction of a large retail levy, which will fund an expansion of the small business rate relief scheme.

Yesterday, I introduced the Rates (Amendment) Bill to give effect to these policies, along with some other measures to help business during the downturn. The second stage debate will take place on 24 January and the Bill should pass through the Assembly by 7 February.

Taking account of concerns expressed during consultation, and a modest increase in regional rate revenue, the levy has been reduced from 20% to 15%. It will affect 76 properties with an average levy of approximately £66,000 per store in 2012/13. The levy will raise around £5m in 2012/13, which will be used to fund expansion of the small business rate relief scheme. This will enable the Executive to roughly double the level of overall help provided under the main scheme, and increase the number of business ratepayers qualifying by around 50%.

Civil Service: Under-representation

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what groups have been identified as being under-represented in appointments to the general service grades in the Civil Service, in the past five years.
(AQO 1070/11-15)

Mr Wilson: None of the competitions advertised in the past five years for general services grades including Administrative Assistant, Administrative Officer and Executive Officer 2 has shown significant under-representation by any equality group in appointments. Corporate HR of the Department liaises closely with colleagues in the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency to minimise any potential adverse impact of selection tools on particular groups of applicants.

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme.
(AQO 1071/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Executive has agreed to expand the small business rate relief scheme, funded from a 15% levy on the largest shops. Additional support, of around £6m in 2012/13, will be provided to up to 8,300 business ratepayers with a net annual value of £5,001 - £10,000. This will enable the Executive to roughly double the level of overall help provided under the main scheme and increase the number of business ratepayers qualifying by around 50%.

During consultation I listened carefully to the concerns expressed about help being provided to businesses that occupy multiple premises, particularly where that business is a national or multi national company. From April business ratepayers occupying multiple premises will not be entitled to relief. For 2012/13 ratepayers can occupy no more than three properties, of any size, in total to receive relief. Those that occupy four premises or more in total will not be eligible for relief on any of their properties. My Department will undertake a review of this condition for the years 2013/14 and 2014/15, bearing in mind the desire to retain an automated scheme and minimise administrative costs.

Yesterday, I introduced the Rates (Amendment) Bill to the Assembly to give effect to these policies, along with some other measures to help business during the downturn. The second stage debate will take place on 24 January and the Bill should pass through the Assembly by 7 February. The changes, along with the large retail levy, will be operational from 1 April subject to Assembly approval.

Rates: Vacant Properties

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many applications have been received for rates relief and exemption since the introduction of the vacant property rates scheme.
(AQO 1072/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Rating of Empty Homes was introduced on 1st October 2011. From that date, rates are payable on all vacant domestic property subject to certain exclusions and exemptions. Some exemptions were applied prior to any rate bills being issued that is, those relating to properties with a Net Annual Value of less than £20,000 and those where properties are completed before 1st April 2012.

Applications must be made for other exclusions for example where owner(s) have moved into nursing homes or where occupation is prohibited or from representatives of a deceased person and so on.

At 11th January 2010, 944 applications have been received for exclusion from rating of empty homes.

Small Businesses

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what support his Department will offer to small businesses in 2012.
(AQO 1073/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Executive has agreed to expand the small business rate relief scheme, funded from a 15% levy on the largest shops. Additional support, of around £6m in 2012/13, will be provided to up to 8,300 business ratepayers with a net annual value of £5,001 - £10,000. This will enable the Executive to roughly double the level of overall help provided under the main scheme and increase the number of business ratepayers qualifying by around 50%.

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Yesterday, I introduced the Rates (Amendment) Bill to the Assembly to give effect to these policies, along with some other measures to help business during the downturn. The second stage debate will take place on 24 January and the Bill should pass through the Assembly by 7 February. The changes, along with the large retail levy, will be operational from 1 April subject to Assembly approval.

Special European Union Programmes Body

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is the average length of time taken by the Special EU Programmes Body to process a funding application.
(AQO 1074/11-15)

Mr Wilson: With regard to the INTERREG IVA Cross Border Cooperation Programme, SEUPB has advised that it takes on average approximately sixty weeks for a project to progress from initial application to final letter of offer.

In the case of the PEACE III Programme, SEUPB has advised it has taken on average approximately forty three weeks to progress a project from initial application to final letter of offer.

DFP: Consultants

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much his Department has paid to consultants in the current financial year.
(AQO 1075/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Expenditure by my Department on External Consultancy in the current financial year as at 10 January 2012 is £115,000.

Air Passenger Duty

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he will support the derogation of Air Passenger Duty, similar to the Scottish Highlands example, to assist plans for tourism in 2012.
(AQO 1076/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Air Passenger Duty (APD) exemption for flights from the Scottish Highlands and Islands was introduced in recognition of the extremely low population density and heavy reliance on air transport in that remote region of the UK.

While Northern Ireland's situation is different, Executive colleagues and I have been concerned about the impact APD was having on our ability to attract and retain air services, particularly to long haul destinations. That is why the Executive successfully pressed the Government to agree to the devolution of APD for direct long haul flights. Once devolved, the draft Programme for Government commits the Executive to eliminating APD on direct long haul flights. We are in the process of finalising the precise arrangements for the devolution of these powers and discussions with Treasury are ongoing in this regard.

Air Passenger Duty

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when he expects air passenger duty powers to be devolved.
(AQO 1077/11-15)

Mr Wilson: We are in the process of finalising the precise arrangements for the devolution of these powers and discussions with Treasury are ongoing in this regard. This will include agreeing which aspects of APD will be devolved, precise costs, and the administrative arrangements for its collection. The Government is also currently considering the precise legislative changes that will be required. Current expectations are that these changes will be made in the 2012 Finance Bill at Westminster which I would expect to have Parliamentary approval by the summer 2012 and Royal Assent by early autumn 2012.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Fire and Rescue Service: Recruitment Drive

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of applicants for the most recent recruitment drive by the Fire and Rescue Service, broken down by geographic area of the applicants; and (ii) the religious background of those who (a) applied; and (b) were appointed.
(AQW 6127/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The information requested is shown in the table.

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service: Recruitment

Number of applicants by geographic area

Eastern	Western	Southern	Northern	Outside Ni	Total
1069	1132	1865	1404	298	**5768**

Religious background of applicants and appointees

	Protestant	Catholic	Other	Total
Applicants	2764	2426	578	**5768**
Appointees	16	18	3	**37**

Fire and Rescue Service: Recruitment Drive

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the most recent recruitment drive for the Fire and Rescue Service, how many applicants were informed that they had failed in a section of the process and following appeal were re-instated.
(AQW 6128/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service has advised that the recent recruitment competition comprised four stages: a multi stage fitness test; an assessment of the candidate's application form: a Practical Aptitude Test (PAT); and an interview. Only the Practical Aptitude Test had an appeal process and the outcome of that process is set out below.

Number of candidates attending the PAT	Number of candidates who failed the PAT	Number of candidates who appealed	Number of candidates retested	Number of successful candidates after retest
665	373	67	45	37

Omagh Health Centre: Funding

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the conditions and the reasons for allocating a substantial amount of funding for the Health Centre in Omagh; (ii) why acute renal services are not being moved to the new acute hospital in Enniskillen; and (iii) whether such a move would be considered at a later date, and if not, why.
(AQW 6162/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) I assume you are referring to the planned Health and Care Centre as part of the new Omagh Local Hospital project.

I approved this project because a sound and robust justification was made in a comprehensive business case by the Western HSC Trust and supported by the Health and Social Care Board. The business case sets out the need for the project. In particular, I consider the health and care element to be a high priority as it will assist in the move of services to the community and help reduce reliance on acute hospitals except where necessary.

(ii) & (iii) The Western Health and Social Care Trust has advised that acute renal services will transfer from the Erne Hospital to the new South West Hospital.

Altnagelvin Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the commitment of £19 million from the Government of the Republic of Ireland towards funding the radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin hospital.
(AQW 6179/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Republic of Ireland Government remains committed to the provision of up to €19m capital funding towards the cost of the project. This has been reaffirmed through letters from ROI Ministers and through ongoing discussions between my Departmental officials and officials from the Department of Health and Children.

Waiting List for Neurology Services in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are on the waiting list for neurology services in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust area and what is the average waiting time for an appointment.
(AQW 6190/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of patients waiting to attend a first outpatient appointment with a neurology consultant at the Belfast HSC Trust, at 30th September 2011, the latest position for which official statistics are available, is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of patients waiting for a first appointment in the neurology specialty at the Belfast HSC Trust: position at 30th September 2011

HSCT	Number of patients waiting (by length of time waiting in weeks)						Total waiting
	0 - 6	>6 - 9	>9 - 13	>13 - 21	>21 - 26	>26	
Belfast	740	263	230	543	239	362	**2,377**

Source: Departmental Return CH3

Data on outpatient waiting times are collected by my Department by aggregate timeband. While it is not possible to calculate an average waiting time from data collected in aggregate timebands, it is possible to calculate the median timeband, a similar statistical measure.

The median waiting time for a first outpatient appointment in the neurology specialty at the Belfast HSC Trust, at 30th September 2011, was '>9-13 weeks'.

The number of patients waiting for inpatient admission in the neurology specialty at the Belfast HSC Trust, at 30th September 2011, is outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Number of patients waiting for inpatient admission in the neurology specialty at the Belfast HSC Trust: position at 30th September 2011

HSCT	Number of patients waiting (by length of time waiting in weeks)						Total waiting
	0 - 6	>6 - 13	>13-21	>21-26	>26-36	>36	
Belfast	30	19	20	4	22	101	**196**

Source: DHSSPS Inpatient Waiting Time Dataset

Data on inpatient waiting times are collected on a patient level basis, enabling average waiting time to be calculated. The average waiting time for inpatient admission in the neurology specialty at the Belfast HSC Trust, at 30th September 2011, was 39 weeks.

Domiciliary Care Patients

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of domiciliary care patients who are currently in receipt of support packages that would exceed the cost of nursing care accommodation; and (ii) what assessment has been made of the level of satisfaction of such patients and their families in terms of the quality and quantity of the care they receive in their own home.
(AQW 6211/11-15)

Mr Poots: (i)The information requested is not gathered.

(ii) In August 2010, my Department published findings from the 2009 Survey of NI Home Care Service Users, administered by Community Information Branch (CIB). This publication reflects a high level of satisfaction, with nearly nine-tenths (89%) of respondents saying that they felt they were always treated with respect and dignity by their care worker(s), and more than four-fifths (85%) of respondents saying that they could not manage at all without the help they get from their care worker(s). Further results from the full survey can be accessed via the following link: http:

//www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/survey_of_home_care_service_users_northern_ireland_2009.pdf .

Satisfaction levels for domiciliary care patients who are currently in receipt of support packages that would exceed the cost of nursing care accommodation are not collated separately.

Hip Replacements: Numbers Waiting

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people who are waiting for a hip replacement procedure in each Health and Social Care Trust area.
(AQW 6252/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of people on the waiting list for a hip replacement procedure, in each Health and Social Care Trust area, at 30th September 2011, the most recent date for which official data are available, is shown in the table below.

HSC Trust	Number of people on the inpatient waiting list for a hip replacement procedure, at 30th September 2011
Belfast	712
Northern[1]	N/A

HSC Trust	Number of people on the inpatient waiting list for a hip replacement procedure, at 30th September 2011
South Eastern	1
Southern	149
Western	338
NI Total	**1,200**

Source: DHSSPS Inpatient Waiting Times Dataset

1 The Northern HSC Trust does not provide inpatient services in the Trauma and Orthopaedic specialty.

Waiting Time for an Appointment with a Neurologist

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the waiting time for an appointment with a neurologist; and (ii) the number of people on the waiting list, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 6253/11-15)

Mr Poots: The (i) waiting time for a first outpatient appointment with a neurologist and (ii) the number of people on the waiting list for a first outpatient appointment in the neurology specialty, at each HSC Trust, is outlined in Table 1 below. This information relates to the position at 30th September 2011, the latest date for which official statistics are available.

Table 1: Number of patients waiting for a first appointment in the neurology specialty at the each HSC Trust: position at 30th September 2011

HSC Trust	Number of patients waiting (by length of time waiting in weeks)						Total
	0-6	>6-9	>9-13	>13-21	>21-26	>26	
Belfast	740	263	230	543	239	362	**2,377**
Northern	194	94	106	203	88	362	**1,047**
Southern	268	79	0	1	0	0	**348**
South Eastern	183	86	63	120	76	75	**603**
Western	260	117	117	236	127	739	**1,596**
Total	**1,645**	**639**	**516**	**1,103**	**530**	**1,538**	**5,971**

Source: Departmental Return CH3

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence: Guidance

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 2044/11-15, whether he will outline or publish the revised process for the implementation of the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence guidance, introduced on 28 September 2011.
(AQW 6487/11-15)

Mr Poots: Circular HSC (SQSD) NICE 04/11 provides full details of the new process for the endorsement, implementation, monitoring and assurance of NICE Technology Appraisals and Clinical Guidelines in Northern Ireland.

It is available on my Department's website using the following link http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/phealth/sqs/sqsd-guidance/sqsd-guidance-nice-guidance.htm

Obesity Prevention Framework

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the proposed Obesity Prevention Framework given the current reports of substantial increases in the numbers of people suffering from obesity.
(AQO 1078/11-15)

Mr Poots: Obesity is one of the key public health challenges facing Northern Ireland. While recent data from the Northern Ireland Health Survey appears to show a levelling off in the prevalence of obesity, we are not complacent and realise that more needs to be done.

The Executive has recently agreed the framework for preventing and addressing overweight and obesity in Northern Ireland, entitled "A Fitter Future for All", and we are currently in the process of finalising the document which will be launched in the near future.

The Framework consists of a range of short, medium and long-term outcomes to address obesity, encourage healthy eating, and promote participation in physical activity. The Public Health Agency has already begun to put in place arrangements to oversee the implementation of the framework.

I am pleased that the draft Programme for Government, currently out for consultation, commits us to investing £7.2million on the Framework over the next three years.

Health and Social Care: Compton Review

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the progress and outworking of the Compton Report.
(AQO 1092/11-15)

Mr Poots: I initiated the Take Note Motion on "Transforming your Care - a Review of Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland" in this House yesterday, and during the debate I outlined the importance of the Review and the work which would now be taken forward in light of it. The debate provided a valuable opportunity for Members to comment on the detail of the Report, following my Statement to the House on the 13 December.

The Review contains a wide-ranging set of proposals which provide a framework for service reconfiguration to be taken forward. In the coming weeks and months the proposals will need to be assessed in detail and translated into more detailed plans on specific changes to be taken forward. The Review recommended that implementation and stakeholder engagement plans should be drawn up and published by June 2012. The plans will be based on population plans for each area, drawn up by each of the Local Commissioning Groups with the Health and Social Care Trusts.

Respite Care

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) how many requests were made for respite care; and (ii) how many requests were successful in gaining respite care provision, in the last 12 months. broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area.
(AQW 6651/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of requests made for respite care and how many requests were successful in gaining respite care provision, in the last 12 months, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area is not available centrally, and could only be provided at disproportionate costs.

Mental Health

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his priorities for mental health services.
(AQO 1086/11-15)

Mr Poots: Priorities for mental health services are to modernise and develop the range and capacity of community based services as an alternative to inpatient treatment. This is in line with the Bamford recommendations.

Community Pharmacies

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what role he sees community pharmacists playing within the evolving new healthcare model.
(AQO 1087/11-15)

Mr Poots: The "Transforming Your Car" proposals envisage a changing model of care which will move the care of patients as close to home as possible. This is an opportunity for community pharmacists to strengthen their role in improving medicines management for patients, helping to minimise waste, contributing to avoiding unnecessary hospital admissions due to medicines induced morbidity or preventing conditions deteriorating through improved concordance. It is a model of care not based on prescription volume but on health outcomes and working as a member of an integrated primary care team.

Given the accessibility that community pharmacy provides to the population, it is uniquely placed to support the delivery of health improvement measures taking the many patient and public interactions to influence health and well being.

Community Pharmacies

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what his Department is doing to alleviate some of the current difficulties faced by pharmacies.
(AQO 1088/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department recognises that it has an obligation to provide fair and reasonable remuneration for community pharmacy. To ensure that there is sufficient cash flow within community pharmacy to cover drugs needed by patients, contractors also receive an upfront advance payment each month to cover the cost of drugs that they need to purchase. An Essential Small Pharmacy Scheme is in place which is designed to ensure the viability of small pharmacies in key locations including rural areas and deprived urban areas.

The HSC Board, as part of its routine business continuity role, monitors the provision of all commissioned health and social care services including community pharmacy services and if any evidence does emerge of any shortfall in services then steps will be rapidly taken to address that shortfall.

The HSC Board is also currently working with CPNI to establish the extent of the financial problems faced by some pharmacies and considering ways in which some alleviation may be provided if necessary.

NHS: Quality Ethos

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to embed a quality ethos throughout the Health Service.
(AQO 1089/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am committed to protecting and improving the quality of health and social care services in Northern Ireland. I launched Quality 2020: A 10-Year Strategy to Protect and Improve Quality in Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland on 17 November 2011 and implementation will begin in April 2012. It defines quality in terms of three key components: safety, effectiveness and patient/client focus. All are important in developing a quality ethos within health and social care.

Embedding this ethos also plays an important part in a number of other current strategies and plans including: the Implementation of the HSC Review; Quality Improvement and Cost Reduction Planning; and the Public Health Strategy.

Learning Disabilities

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what he is doing to improve the lives of people with a learning disability and their families.
(AQO 1090/11-15)

Mr Poots: Improving services for people with a learning disability remains one of my highest priorities. Through continued implementation of the Bamford Action Plan my Department, in collaboration with other Departments and Agencies, is working to deliver improvements across a range of learning disability services such as respite provision, day opportunities, and transition to adulthood.

We have also recently published, for consultation, a Learning Disability Service Framework. This Framework aims to improve the health and wellbeing of people with a learning disability and their carers and families, by promoting social inclusion, reducing inequalities in health and social wellbeing and improving the quality of health and social care services, especially supporting those most vulnerable in our society.

Community Pharmacy: Judicial Review

Ms Gildernew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether any discussions have been held with Community Pharmacy following the outcome of the recent judicial review.
(AQO 1091/11-15)

Mr Poots: Mr Justice Treacy made his judgement on the Judicial Review, brought by CPNI against changes to pharmacy remuneration made by the Department and the HSC Board on 21 December 2011 and also announced that a remedy hearing was scheduled for 9 January 2012. However, the written judgement was not issued until 10 January 2012. The remedy hearing has now been scheduled for mention on 16 January when a date for the hearing will be set.

I have already indicated to CPNI that once I have considered the written judgement and the outcome of the remedy hearing I will meet with them, as soon as possible thereafter, to discuss the way forward.

Department of Justice

Prison: Alternatives

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what new projects or initiatives his Department intends to introduce as an alternative to or diversion from prison.
(AQW 6164/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): In response to a commitment made in the Hillsborough Castle Agreement, I consulted last year on a review of community sentences, which explored the role, scope and effectiveness of current community disposals, opened up the debate on the value of short prison sentences for low level offenders, and sought views on the need for change.

My officials are currently in discussion with the Justice Committee on draft proposals on the way forward, in light of responses to the consultation - the consensus of responses was that custody for this cohort of offenders should be used as a last resort and that community sentences here did much more to tackle the factors that lead offenders to reoffend – and the recommendation of the Prisons Review Report that community sentences should be the preferred method of dealing with those who would otherwise get short custodial sentences.

I hope to announce definitive proposals on the way forward in the near future.

Prison: Alternatives

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what new trends have been identified as alternatives to prison.
(AQW 6166/11-15)

Mr Ford: In response to a commitment made in the Hillsborough Castle Agreement, I consulted last year on a review of community sentences, which explored the role, scope and effectiveness of current community disposals, opened up the debate on the value of short prison sentences for low level offenders, and sought views on the need for change.

My officials are currently in discussion with the Justice Committee on draft proposals on the way forward, in light of responses to the consultation - the consensus of responses was that custody for this cohort of offenders should be used as a last resort and that community sentences here did much more to tackle the factors that lead offenders to reoffend – and the recommendation of the Prisons Review Report that community sentences should be the preferred method of dealing with those who would otherwise get short custodial sentences.

I hope to announce definitive proposals on the way forward in the near future.

Courthouses: Closure

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to detail, for each of the last five years, the number of summonses that were processed per annum through each of the five courthouses which are now targetted for closure.
(AQW 6189/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below sets out the number of cases processed at each Hearing Centre by business type.

Processing Office [1]	Business Type	Cases Dealt With [2]					
		2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total
Bangor	Criminal	2095	2081	1910	1597	1702	9385
	Civil & Family	462	217	205	198	144	1226
	Total	**2557**	**2298**	**2115**	**1795**	**1846**	**10611**
Larne	Criminal	819	768	733	726	576	3622
	Civil & Family	414	233	192	170	181	1190
	Total	**1233**	**1001**	**925**	**896**	**757**	**4812**
Limavady	Criminal	1282	1315	1079	1246	1068	5990
	Civil & Family	178	110	111	117	41	557
	Total	**1460**	**1425**	**1190**	**1363**	**1109**	**6547**
Magherafelt	Criminal	1009	1078	1061	1096	1122	5366
	Civil & Family	273	71	85	115	82	626
	Total	**1282**	**1149**	**1146**	**1211**	**1204**	**5992**
Strabane	Criminal	1476	1314	1003	1145	1042	5980
	Civil & Family	606	136	162	208	184	1296
	Total	**2082**	**1450**	**1165**	**1353**	**1226**	**7276**

[1] Court offices based on the processing office as recorded on the Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service ICOS IT system for 2007-2010. In 2006 Crown Court, Magistrates' Court, and family and children order business were recorded on manual forms and pertain to the court office which disposed of/dealt with the case. In 2006 civil County Court business was recorded on ICOS and therefore the court offices are based on the processing office as recorded on ICOS. A case may be processed at one venue and heard at another.

[2] Cases dealt with are based on criminal defendants, civil and family cases, Children Order cases and applications disposed of. The figures for criminal cases include cases initiated by way of charge sheet. The total figures include cases initiated by way of summons, charge sheet and application. Debt cases in the Magistrates' Court (from 2007 onwards) and licensing in the Magistrates' and County Court are excluded as these numbers are held manually and not centrally collated.

Courthouses: Closure

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether distance and access will be taken into account when considering the proposals to close a number of couthouses for (i) people attending court; and (ii) legal representatives, particularly those representatives who are legal aid funded and entitled to mileage costs.
(AQW 6260/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is recognised that under the proposals some court users may be required to travel further to attend court. The consultation document seeks views in relation to the transfer of business to alternative venues and travel time. All responses will be considered as part of the consultation process.

Courthouses: Closure

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the proposal to close a number of court houses, whether existing cases would be absorbed into the court division from which they originated, or whether court division area will widened.
(AQW 6418/11-15)

Mr Ford: Under the Hearing Centre courthouse closure proposals, cases would transfer to an alternative court venue within the County Court Division. As there is limited scope to absorb additional hearing days at Londonderry Courthouse, Limavady business would transfer to Coleraine and Magherafelt business would transfer to Antrim which are not in the same County Court Division. It is proposed that these transfers would only take place following the implementation of wider boundary reforms which were the subject of previous consultation.

Security Forces: Risks Associated with Using Social Media

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Justice what advice is given to members of the security forces on the risks associated with using social media.
(AQW 6603/11-15)

Mr Ford: Whilst this is an operational matter for the Chief Constable, I have been assured that he has taken appropriate steps to remind police officers of the risks associated with using social media.

Responsibility for providing advice to members of the armed forces rests with the Ministry of Defence.

Department for Regional Development

Road Safety Engineering Measures at Schools

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the development of a new all embracing policy that will focus on rationalising all the current road safety engineering measures at schools, including measures available to improve safety outside schools.
(AQW 6176/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I can advise the Member that my Department's Roads Service has, for a number of years, been developing and implementing a wide range of road safety engineering measures at schools. Further initiatives, such as part time 20 mph speed limits and sustainable school travel measures, have also been successfully developed.

I am advised that a new Roads Service Policy and Procedure Guide is going to be developed that will contain all the most successful and effective engineering measures. A Working Group has been established, and it is anticipated that the policy will be in place by April 2012.

Foyle Ferry Service

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps he has taken to facilitate the restoration of the Foyle Ferry Service.
(AQW 6239/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have had no involvement in this matter. My Department was not involved in setting up the Magilligan to Greencastle ferry service and has not had any operational responsibility for it. In addition my Department does not have the legislative authority to support such a ferry service.

School Buses

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will consider introducing legislation to prohibit the overtaking of parked school buses and Translink vehicles which are carrying school children.
(AQO 1050/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member may be aware that this issue was considered as part of the joint NI Assembly Inquiry into home to school transport in 2006 which resulted in a series of recommendations to improve the safety of school children during their journeys to school.

While several Government Departments contribute, in various ways, to the safety of children travelling to and from school, my Department's Roads Service has responsibility for the enabling legislation to prevent vehicles overtaking stationary school buses when children were boarding or unboarding at bus stops.

Roads Service officials have advised that they would be very reluctant to support such legislation for the road safety and traffic management for the following reasons:

- that prohibiting the overtaking of school buses by other vehicles may result in school children becoming complacent when alighting from normal service buses both during and outside school times or during school holidays;
- drivers following a school bus may take unnecessary risks in trying to overtake the bus before it comes to its next stopping point;
- officials consider that educating children to exercise caution when alighting from all bus services, combined with increased driver awareness is the most appropriate way forward. Department of the Environment (DOE) currently delivers this message to schools, as part of its road safety education programme;
- The Department for Transport in England has conducted research and considers that the introduction of a ban on traffic passing a stationary school bus, where children are getting on or off, could well increase, rather than decrease, casualties;
- If the proposal was to apply to Translink service buses, it would result in unsustainable traffic congestion, for much of the day, on major urban and rural roads; and
- on a world-wide basis, only the USA and Canada have an overtaking ban, while the vast majority of countries have similar regulations on school buses to the UK. In the USA, laws banning the overtaking of stationary school buses are widely reported to be central to the success of yellow school buses. However, even in the USA, evidence varies greatly from state to state. An official estimate from New York State was that 50,000 vehicles pass stopped school buses illegally every day. In North Carolina, where many school buses are fitted with cameras on the stop-arm of the buses, it is estimated that illegal passing of school buses takes place an average of 1900 times per day.

I take the safety of school children very seriously, and my Department and other statutory road safety partners are continually researching and implementing measures to make the journey to school as safe as possible. Initiatives such as the Safer Routes to Schools programme and part time 20 mph speed limits have additional engineering measures installed to protect children and to alert drivers to their presence. These include additional signing and road markings, flashing lights, central reserves and off-road bus parking.

Traffic: Rathgael Road, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department intends to take to reduce the volume of traffic on the Rathgael Road, Bangor.
(AQW 6356/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service currently has no plans to implement any measures in order to reduce the volume of traffic on Rathgael Road, Bangor.

Department for Social Development

High Street Retailers

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Social Development whether her Department has any plans to adopt the measures in the Mary Portas report in England aimed at reviving high street retailers.
(AQW 6154/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The Portas Review extends only to Great Britain and does not include Northern Ireland. However, given that many of the issues will have a direct read across to towns and cities in Northern Ireland, my Department is presently considering the report and its findings and how they could be used to assist our existing plans to support urban regeneration at a time of economic hardship for retailers and businesses.

Repossessed Houses

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses have been repossessed in each of the last four years.
(AQW 6415/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department does not hold the information requested. However, the Department of Justice has provided the information in the table attached and has advised as follows: -

The table attached details the number of repossession cases disposed of by the Enforcement of Justice Office (EJO). It should be noted that not all repossession cases granted by the court are lodged with EJO. In some cases an arrangement may be agreed

between the creditor and debtor following the court hearing. It is also the case that some debtors will recognise that they can no longer afford to keep the property and choose to hand the property over to the creditor without recourse to enforcement. It is not possible to quantify the number of cases which end in these ways as they are resolved outside the control or knowledge of the EJO.

Table – Possession Cases Disposed by EJO

Disposal/Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	Disposal Description
Eviction	195	438	681	875	Order for Possession was executed where the property was not vacated voluntarily by the debtor
Handover	15	14	43	78	Order for Possession was executed where the property was vacated voluntarily by the debtor
Withdrawal	163	90	76	81	Where the creditor has withdrawn proceedings in the EJO
Total Cases Disposed	**373 (-1% from 07)**	**542 (+45% from 2008)**	**800 (+47% from 2009)**	**1034 (+29% from 2010)**	

Repossessed Houses: Foyle

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses have been repossessed in the Foyle constituency in each of the last four years.
(AQW 6571/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department does not hold the information requested. The Department of Justice has also advised me that the information is not available in the format requested but has provided the following information:

A plaintiff begins an action for an order for possession of property. The court, following a judicial hearing, may grant an order for possession. This entitles the plaintiff to apply to have the defendant evicted. However, even where an order for eviction is issued the parties can still negotiate a compromise to prevent eviction.

The court orders the defendant to deliver possession of the property to the plaintiff within a specified time. If the defendant fails to comply with the court order the plaintiff may proceed to apply to the Enforcement of Judgements Office to repossess the property and give possession of it to the plaintiff.

Not all writs and originating summonses lead to eviction or repossession

Mortgage Applications – Orders Made – Foyle Constituency

Orders made[1]	2007	2008	2009	2010
Possession	61	91	125	123

[1] More than one order can be made per case so these figures do not necessarily equal the number of cases disposed of

Repossessed Houses

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses have been repossessed in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6630/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department does not hold the information requested. However, the Department of Justice has provided the information in the table attached and has advised as follows: -

The table attached details the number of repossession cases disposed of by the Enforcement of Justice Office (EJO). It should be noted that not all repossession cases granted by the court are lodged with EJO. In some cases an arrangement may be agreed between the creditor and debtor following the court hearing. It is also the case that some debtors will recognise that they can no longer afford to keep the property and choose to hand the property over to the creditor without recourse to enforcement. It is not possible to quantify the number of cases which end in these ways as they are resolved outside the control or knowledge of the EJO.

Table – Possession Cases Disposed by EJO

Disposal/ Year	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**Disposal Description**
Eviction	438	681	875	Order for Possession was executed where the property was not vacated voluntarily by the debtor
Handover	14	43	78	Order for Possession was executed where the property was vacated voluntarily by the debtor
Withdrawal	90	76	81	Where the creditor has withdrawn proceedings in the EJO
Total Cases Disposed	**542** **(+45% from 2008)**	**800** **(+47% from 2009)**	**1034** **(+29% from 2010)**	

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 27 January 2012

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Ilex Urban Regeneration Company: One Plan for Derry Regeneration Programme

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the implementation of the recommendations in the review of the Ilex Urban Regeneration Company's One Plan for Derry regeneration programme.
(AQW 6204/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The One City, One Plan One Voice Regeneration Plan has not been the subject of a review. However since its launch in June 2011, there continues to be progress in taking forward the recommendations contained within the Plan. All departments have been briefed by the Strategy Board and along with our Ministerial colleague, the Minister for Social Development, we brought the One Plan to the Executive in November. The Executive agreed to support the recommendations and Ministers also agreed to provide a senior official to liaise between each department and the Strategy Board.

We have also ensured that key milestones in the achievement of One Plan outcomes are included in the draft Programme for Government.

Military Sites: Disposal

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the disposal of former military sites under the Hillsborough Agreement.
(AQW 6208/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: St Patrick's Barracks, Ballymena and parts of St Lucia Barracks, Omagh were gifted to OFMDFM in April 2011 under the Hillsborough Castle Agreement. The Shackleton Barracks site at Ballykelly was transferred to OFMDFM on 7 October 2011.

As these sites are complex and offer a range of possible uses, advice on the options for disposal of the sites to achieve value for the Executive is being developed with the help of the Asset Management Unit and its specialist advisers. We will consider the most appropriate way forward for each of them in due course.

Economic Downturn

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the implementation of the Executive's priority measures to deal with the economic downturn.
(AQW 6261/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Executive published its package of priority measures to deal with the economic downturn on 20 May 2010. An interim evaluation of the package was undertaken by OFMDFM's Economic Policy Unit in the autumn of 2010. The results of this interim evaluation demonstrated positive progress in terms of recommendations completed, actioned and ongoing. Approximately four-fifths of the 151 recommendations were either complete or being progressed (around one-quarter of recommendations fully completed, almost one-fifth being continued as part of departments' work programmes and just over one-third working towards completion dates). The OFMDFM Business Plan contains a target for the complete implementation of the Executive's Priority Measures to deal with the Economic Downturn by December 2011. A Post Project Evaluation of the complete package of measures is due to be undertaken shortly.

Victims and Survivors Service

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the establishment of the Victims and Survivors Service.
(AQW 6262/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We would refer the Member to the reply we gave to AQO 985/11-15 on 16 December 2011.

Customised Brussels-based Programme

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether every new Minister has been offered a customised Brussels-based programme to assist them in furthering their European objectives and Executive priorities.
(AQW 6264/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Since the Assembly elections in May 2011, our Office in Brussels has facilitated eight programmes for the Ministers of Enterprise, Trade and Investment; Agriculture and Rural Development; Regional Development and Junior Ministers. The Office is also currently in discussions with a number of other departments concerning proposed programmes in the coming months.

Following the agreement of the Executive's European Priorities, the Head of our European Division wrote to all Permanent Secretaries on 6 September offering to develop a focused Ministerial programme in Brussels, based upon their EU priorities.

Wealth Inequality

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the current level of wealth inequality; and what additional measures they intends to put in place to reduce the current level of inequality.
(AQW 6287/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Information on wealth equality is only available for Great Britain and not for here.

Given our sample size, an approach such as that used by the Wealth and Assets Survey is unlikely to yield results of sufficient accuracy to enable useful interpretation to be drawn. In addition, wealth inequality is very difficult to measure with precision because the valuation of assets and property is market led.

However, household income and poverty measures are monitored over time and the Executive has in place a wide range of policies to reduce poverty and social exclusion. The 'Lifetime Opportunities' anti-poverty strategy, the broad architecture and principles of which the Executive adopted in 2008, is supported by a range of measures that monitor poverty within different types of households.

The Executive has agreed to the establishment of new funds to address need. The first of these, the Social Protection Fund, currently in process of delivery, will initially provide help to those most in need of assistance with fuel costs. The second, the Social Investment Fund, which will become operational in 2012/13, has as a key aim of tackling poverty.

One of the ways we measure poverty is the relative income poverty measure. This will measure and monitor the relativity of poverty to the median UK household income.

Social Protection Fund and Social Investment Fund

Mr Kinahan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what independent monitoring system will be put in place to ensure transparency in relation to the (i) Social Protection Fund; and (ii) Social Investment Fund.
(AQW 6326/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The public consultation on our proposals for the Social Investment Fund ended on 23 December 2011 and the responses received are currently being analysed. It is intended that a monitoring and evaluation framework will be developed as part of the final delivery arrangements for the Fund.

The Social Protection Fund is being used, this financial year, to deliver a Winter Poverty Payment Scheme through DSD and DHSSPS. It will be for those Departments to ensure appropriate monitoring is put in place.

Natural Hazards: Resilience of Key Infrastructure

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the strategy to improve the resilience of key infrastructure to natural hazards, which was included in their Department's Business Plan 2011/12.
(AQW 6362/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Our officials have held detailed discussions with a number of departments and agencies about their work in assessing risks to key infrastructure and how these might be mitigated. As a result, officials are now undertaking a more detailed assessment of the applicability and extent of that work, with a view to determining if a formal strategy continues to represent the best way to proceed at this time.

Pandemic Influenza Framework

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Pandemic Influenza Framework, which was included in their Department's Business Plan 2011/12.
(AQW 6363/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM officials chair a sub-group of the Civil Contingencies Group (NI) comprising representatives from both health and non-health organisations working together to develop and maintain planning and response arrangements for an influenza pandemic. These arrangements will be set out within a Pandemic Influenza Framework, the terms of which we anticipate will be finalised within the next few weeks following consideration by key stakeholders.

Ministerial Budget Review Group

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how they are supporting the Ministerial Budget Review Group in its review of arm's-length bodies.
(AQW 6365/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We jointly chair the Budget Review Group, which the Executive has decided should conduct a review of arms length bodies against criteria determined by the Executive.

Our officials, in collaboration with DFP officials, have been analysing detailed responses from departments on the review criteria. Following this, we intend to bring a paper to a future meeting of the Budget Review Group, and the views of the Group will inform the recommendations which we, as joint chairs of the Group, ultimately bring to the Executive.

OFMDFM: Transfer of Functions to Local Government

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, for each of the last five years, to detail the functions that (i) have been transferred; and (ii) are planned to be transferred from their Department to local councils, and of these, to detail (a) the reason behind the transfer of each function; (b) whether additional funding was offered to local councils to assist them in carrying out the functions; and (c) the cost, to their Department, of the final year when each of the functions were the responsibility of their Department; and (iii) may be transferred from their Department to local councils at a future date,
(AQW 6395/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: No functions have been transferred from OFMDFM to local councils in the past five years, nor are there any plans to do so.

Asset Management Unit

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the Asset Management Unit has produced regular reports for the Executive on the progress in delivering the asset disposal target, as set out in the Budget 2011-15.
(AQW 6456/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Asset Management Unit (AMU) reported to the Executive's Budget Review Group (BRG) on 11 October 2011 on progress with meeting asset disposal targets. The AMU is due to report again on this subject on 31 January 2012.

Trade Unions: Funding

Mr McCallister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the level of funding their Department allocated to each trade union in the (i) 2000/01; (ii) 2005/06; and (iii) 2010/11 financial years.
(AQW 6493/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:

Financial year	Funding allocated to trade union
2000/2001	Nil
2005/2006	Nil
2010/2011	£3000 to FDA

The FDA (formerly the First Division Association) is a professional association and union representing senior public servants.

In 2010/2011 all departments including OFMDFM agreed to jointly fund the position of Secretary within the FDA.

The decision to fund FDA was agreed by Departmental officials through Human Resources Directors Group.

Londonderry: UK City of Culture

Mr Campbell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of a recent statement attributed to their Department's Junior Minister, in relation to Londonderry's designation as the UK City of Culture, which stated that 'the only way is to neutralise the UK prefix', whether this comment was issued in the role as junior Minister.
(AQW 6563/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Martina Anderson MLA's comments were not made in her role as Junior Minister.

Welfare Reform Bill

Mr Durkan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the timescale for the establishment of an advisory group, as set out in the draft Programme for Government, to assist Ministers in alleviating hardship resulting from the Welfare Reform Bill.
(AQW 6570/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We will establish the advisory group and arrange its first meeting during February 2012.

Social Investment Fund

Mr S Anderson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Social Investment Fund.
(AQW 6638/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The public consultation on the Social Investment Fund proposals ended on 23 December 2011.

During the consultation period, six public events were held, at which initial proposals were outlined and then discussed in detail. Attendance at these public events was high, with almost 240 participants.

During the consultation period, our officials also met with a number of key statutory bodies and other departments. This was with a view to ensuring that the Social Investment Fund complements other area based initiatives.

We have received over three hundred formal consultation responses, which our officials are currently analysing. This will help to inform final proposals for operational arrangements for the Fund.

Whilst several key issues have already emerged, it would be wrong for us to detail these in depth until all of the input to the consultation has been fully reflected on.

We hope to be in a position to publish a consultation report in the coming months. In parallel, we will develop and bring final proposals to the Executive with a view to having the Fund fully operational as soon as possible.

Our Children and Young People - Our Pledge

Mr Storey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on 'Our Children and Young People-Our Pledge'.
(AQW 6652/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are currently evaluating the success of the 2008-11 Action Plan with a view to developing a successive Action Plan for the next period, along with the governance arrangements required to support its implementation.

Civil Contingencies Framework

Mrs Hale asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the Civil Contingency Framework will be consolidated into Civil Contingency Legislation.
(AQW 6653/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: There are no plans at present to incorporate the terms of the Northern Ireland Civil Contingencies Framework into legislation.

Attorney General's Office

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the Attorney General's Office is operating within the budget allocated at the start of this financial year.
(AQW 6707/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We can confirm that the Attorney General's Office is operating within the budget allocated at the start of this financial year.

Social Investment Fund: Equality Impact Assessment

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the Equality Impact Assessment for the Social Investment Fund will be repeated to ensure that the entirety of the fund proposals will be assessed and not just the objective of the fund.
(AQW 6757/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: It is our intention that equality implications are fully considered when implementing the Social Investment Fund. In particular, equality impact screening, and if necessary full assessments, will be completed before funding is awarded through the Strategic Area Plans.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Laying Hens Directive: Compliance

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps her Department has taken to ensure compliance with the Laying Hens Directive throughout Northern Ireland.
(AQW 6100/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Following on from the Statement which I made in the Assembly on 6 December 2011, I can confirm that robust enforcement action is underway to ensure compliance with the Welfare of Laying Hens Directive.

All producers targeted by my Department's risk-based analysis will be visited over the coming weeks. If contraventions are found at the time of the visit, they will be dealt with using provisions within the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations, and the Egg Marketing Regulations. If any hens are still in conventional cages at the time of the inspection, Rectification Notices will be issued to producers under the Welfare Regulations. Rectification notices will be followed up with an Advisory Notice to producers - permitting the marketing or movement of eggs for Class B grading or directly to processing establishments. If evidence comes to light that a packing centre is knowingly marketing conventional cage eggs as Class A, a Compliance Notice will be issued to the packer. Prosecution will also be considered. We anticipate that any remaining non-compliant producers here will have depopulated by end of January.

I am deploying the same methods as Defra to stop illegally produced eggs from entering the shell egg market in the north of Ireland, namely Ultra Violet light analysis combined with shared compliant producer lists to help identify and control non-compliant imports from other Member States. I will monitor the situation carefully here and will not hesitate to press the Commission further if any issues arise.

I, together with my counter parts in Britain, are taking steps to establish as much compliance as possible with the conventional cage ban for egg products. Ensuring that retailers, food manufacturers and the food service industry have stringent traceability in place to ensure that they are not using non-compliant eggs is an essential component of our enforcement strategy. The British Retail Consortium has come out publically in support of egg producers and has guaranteed that conventional caged eggs will not be bought by the major retailers or used as ingredients in their own–brand products. They have put in place stringent traceability tests to ensure that they will not be buying non-compliant eggs. The main multi-national retailers who have operations in the north have also made this guarantee. Members of the Food and Drink Federation and the Hospitality Association have given similar guarantees. We have also been assured by the Central Procurement Directorate that under Government Purchasing Standards only eggs and egg products from a compliant source will be used.

All of the actions outlined should ensure that local producers are protected as well as preventing any illegally produced eggs from reaching the shell egg market in the north of Ireland.

I would advise you that the Commission has begun the early stages of pre-infraction procedures with non-compliant Member States. Britain and the north of Ireland have been included in this action.

Post Project Evaluation 'Cessation of Interceptor Mixed Stock Fisheries on North Atlantic Salmon not Achieving their Conservation Limits'

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the issues raised by her Department which resulted in the delay of the original completion date of the draft PPE 'Cessation of interceptor mixed stock fisheries on North Atlantic salmon not achieving their conservation limits'.
(AQW 6137/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Post Project Evaluation in relation to the 'Cessation of interceptor mixed stock fisheries on North Atlantic salmon not achieving their conservation limits' was drafted by the Loughs Agency in January 2010 but returned on a number of occasions by the Loughs Agency's two sponsor Departments as the Departments felt some issues had not been properly addressed.

These issues included the need for closer correlation between targets set and the record of their achievement, the need to improve clarity regarding the annual evaluation of the project and in relation to the comparison between cost estimates and cost totals.

In-shore Fisheries

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether there are any plans for managing and regulating inshore fisheries which are not presently managed by Lough Agencies.
(AQW 6182/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Inshore sea fisheries are managed and regulated directly by the Fisheries and Environment Division of my Department. The Department has commissioned the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute to develop a draft inshore sea fisheries strategy, which is intended for consultation with stakeholders during 2012. The strategy will include consideration of management and regulation issues.

Beragh Flood Alleviation Scheme: Additional Funding

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in light of the £1 million additional funding for the Beragh flood alleviation scheme, what additional funding is being made available to address the flooding that has occurred in Carnlough village; and how she determines where flood alleviation funding is to be allocated.[R]
(AQW 6199/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The additional £1 million funding made available to my Rivers Agency is to help with flood alleviation throughout the north of Ireland and was not specifically for the Beragh flood defence scheme. Funding for flood alleviation schemes throughout

the north of Ireland is prioritised on the level of risk to property and health and the potential benefit gained in the reduction of that risk through completion of a scheme. Currently there are no plans to progress a flood alleviation scheme at Carnlough Village.

Flooding

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her Department's roles and responsibilities in assisting with incidents of flooding which occur as a result of river flooding; and how it is determined whether a flooding incident is serious enough for the people affected to receive assistance from her Department.
(AQW 6205/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In a flooding event my Rivers Agency will prioritise calls received on the level of risk attached to each incident reported. All calls relating to imminent danger to life are directed to the Emergency Services. Other calls relating to flooding or potential flooding of property caused by overtopping of rivers will be prioritised and my Rivers Agency will try to respond with properties at immediate risk of flooding being highest priority. However, it should be borne in mind that my Rivers Agency has a limited labour resource which is quickly exhausted and may not be able to respond to all calls to prevent flooding occurring. During a flooding event members of the public can contact the flooding incident line on 0300 2000 100.

Flooding: Rescue of Trapped Farm Animals

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) what resources her Department has made available to aid the rescue of farm animals trapped as a result of river flooding; (ii) how farmers can access these resources; (iii) whether she is aware of the incident in Coleraine where flood water from the River Bann marooned 31 spring lambs, and the farmer had to seek assistance from elsewhere as her Department was unable to help; and (iv) to outline the reasons why her Department was unable to help the farmer affected by this incident.
(AQW 6212/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department and specifically my Rivers Agency do not have any specialist training nor any resources available to them to aid the rescue of farm animals trapped as a result of river flooding. I am aware of the incident involving lambs trapped by floodwaters at Coleraine and I am informed that the caller who reported the incident to my Rivers Agency was advised that the Rivers Agency are not trained in this specialist type of rescue and they were referred to the NI Fire and Rescue Service for assistance.

Harvested Wood

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the amount of wood under Forestry NI control that was (a) suitable for harvesting; and (b) harvested in each of the last three years; (ii) the revenue received from harvested wood; and (iii) the amount of harvested wood that was stolen over this period of time.
(AQW 6225/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

(i) The amount of wood that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Forest Service deemed suitable for harvesting and which was dispatched from forests in each of the last three years was:

	Quantity in cubic metres
April 2008 - March 2009	404,899 m^3
April 2009 – March 2010	437,196 m^3
April 2010 – March 2011	495,856 m^3

(ii) the revenue received from harvested wood; and (iii) the amount of harvested wood that was stolen over this period of time was:

	(ii) revenue received from harvested wood	**(iii) amount of harvested wood stolen**
April 2008 - March 2011	£22.47 million	449 m^3

Countryside Management Unit

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) how many staff work in the Countryside Management Branch; (ii) what delays have been experienced by staff in carrying out the annual inspections of participants in the Countryside Management Scheme; and (iii) what steps have been taken by the Department to address these delays.
(AQW 6272/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

(i) Countryside Management Unit has three Branches which carry out all land –based inspections. The inspections for agri-environment schemes are carried out by 30 members of Countryside Management Delivery Branch.

(ii) In-line with EU requirements 5% of claimants were inspected initially and a high level of non-compliance and over-declaration by claimants was detected. As a result, my Department had to increase the number of inspections from 66 to 358. The additional workload to complete these inspections, and the associated administrative checks, has resulted in delayed payments to scheme participants.

(iii) The workload in Countryside Management Delivery Branch has had to be prioritised. As a result my Department has had to delay the entry into the NICMS for 1300 new participants, until 1 January 2013.

Hospitality: Spend

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what has been the total spend on hospitality by her Department in each of the last five years.
(AQW 6317/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Hospitality costs for each of the last five years for the Department and its Agencies were:

2006/07	£68,968
2007/08	£55,931
2008/09	£74,991
2009/10	£66,425
2010/11	£62,728

Fishing: Sea Bass

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) why fishing for Sea Bass has been allowed through a 'by-catch' clause; (ii) what were the alternatives; and (iii) why these alternatives were not used instead.
(AQW 6324/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department is currently preparing the draft Protection and Conservation of Sea Bass (NI) Regulations 2012 that we hope to bring into operation later this year. A full consultation took place during 2010 on the proposed regulations. All parties with an interest were invited to comment through the consultation process. Opinions expressed were strongly divided between the recreational and commercial sectors.

Following receipt of the responses the draft proposals were reviewed and I decided that it was appropriate to provide an exemption from some of the proposed regulations for certain commercial fishing gears. This will either be by specifying which gears are exempt or by introducing a by-catch level for these gears. The exemption is only proposed for trawl gears currently used to catch Nephrops, white fish or herring and mackerel in offshore waters, inshore netting and long lining would remain subject to the Regulations.

We support the proposal for a general prohibition on the sale of Bass, but with an exemption for licensed fishing vessels that catch Bass accidentally in trawl gear. The justification for this is as follows: While the current catches of Bass are small and infrequent as these vessels operate in the offshore area, a prohibition on landings and subsequent sale will increase discards contrary to our discard reduction policy. Bass caught by trawling cannot be released alive and therefore the impact on the stock is no greater by allowing such landings and any Bass that is caught by these vessels would be recorded and could contribute to knowledge of the state of the stock

The only alternative to allowing a by-catch (or exemption element for certain trawl gears) is a total ban on all commercial fishing for Bass. This would result in more Bass discards from trawl fisheries and this would be contrary to our discard reduction policy. To condone discards would undermine our position in negotiations elsewhere, such as in Europe where we argue against proposals that might increase discards.

I would also reinforce the point that the main threat to Bass is likely to be from commercial netting and long lining in the inshore zone and we intend to prohibit landings and retention of Bass by these means.

The overall intent remains to prevent the overexploitation of Bass by recreational and commercial fishers and encourage conditions under which the stock may grow.

Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments) Regulations (NI) 2012

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether an equality impact assessment has been carried out on the proposed Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments) Regulations (NI) 2012.
(AQW 6325/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department carried out an equality screening test to determine if the proposed Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments) Regulations (NI) 2012 have the potential to have a differential impact on different groups of people in terms of equality. The proposed Regulations will not impose any new or additional requirements in relation to welfare standards where good practice is already adopted by dog breeders and the proposed new requirements including the microchipping of dogs and

pups will apply equally to all dog breeding establishments. In addition, in earlier discussions with stakeholders no information emerged to indicate that the proposed Regualations would impact adversely on any Section 75 Group. The draft Regulations have therefore been provisionally 'screened out' as regards equality impact, which means that a full Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) is unnecessary. However, the Equality Screening Out Document was included as part of my Department's 12-week public consultation on the draft Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments) Regulations, which closed on 10 January 2012. Consultees were asked if they agreed this assessment. Following the analysis of consultation responses, should any evidence be produced to the contrary, the equality impact screening document will be revised and a full EQIA will be completed if necessary.

Flooding: Trapped Farm Animals

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of incidences of farm animals being trapped, as a result of river flooding during the current winter period, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 6330/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Rivers Agency do not collate this information and would have no statistics to provide.

Schmallenberg Virus

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the nature of any discussions her Department has had in relation to the Schmallenberg Virus; and (ii) what plans have been put in place to safeguard the industry from the virus.
(AQW 6383/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Officials from my Department have met with the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) to discuss the current situation in relation to Schmallenberg Virus (SBV) and consider what action may be appropriate here. In addition they have been in regular contact with officials in Defra and in DAFM in the south.

As a result of these discussions and the information emerging from the European Commission, and taking account of veterinary advice, we will carry out targeted surveillance focused on ruminants and their offspring that have been imported from affected areas since 1 June 2011 to help assess the risk of SBV incursion into the north of Ireland. We will also carry out enhanced surveillance of neonatal calves and foetuses that meet a clinical case definition. At this time there is no evidence of the disease here.

Information on this new disease has been posted on both the DARD and AFBI websites. We have sent letters to all Private Veterinary Practitioners and animal importers alerting them to the clinical signs of the disease and advising of the Department's intention to carry out some targeted surveillance. My officials have also met with key stakeholders to discuss the situation.

AFBI is in contact with the Friedrich Loeffler Institute (FLI) in Germany, which is the laboratory that identified the virus and which has developed a test for it. A Materials Transfer Agreement (MTA) has been put in place to allow AFBI access to their protocol for testing for Schmallenberg virus and this will allow AFBI to carry out tests for the virus. It is estimated that AFBI will have diagnostic capability in the next two weeks.

I would emphasise that knowledge of this new disease is changing rapidly and we will be monitoring developments very closely over the coming weeks as further information becomes available.

Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments) Regulations (NI) 2012

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) whether she is aware of the concerns within dog breeding organisations about the proposed Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments) Regulations (NI) 2012; and (ii) what steps she intends to take to alleviate the concerns.
(AQW 6384/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am aware that some dog breeding organisations have expressed concerns about some of the proposals in the Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments) Regulations (NI) 2012, which have recently been the subject of public consultation. One breeding organisation has written to me requesting a meeting to discuss the proposed Regulations and I will be meeting them shortly so that I can hear their concerns at first hand.

The consultation on these draft Regulations issued to over 2,000 consultees and the process has given dog breeders, specialist interest groups, Councils and the general public the opportunity to consider and comment on the proposed new dog breeding regulations. The 12 week consultation closed on 10 January 2012 and a substantial number of responses have been received. My officials are currently analysing these responses and I will be considering all of them before I make any decisions on the draft regulations. It is not my intention to curtail legitimate breeding but to protect, and where necessary, to improve the welfare of all puppies and dogs in breeding establishments.

Rural Proofing: Legislation

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 3460/11-15, to detail (i) who offers the advice and support service for rural proofing; (ii) where this service can be accessed; and (iii) when the impact review will be carried out.
(AQW 6386/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Support and guidance for rural proofing is available from Sustainable Rural Communities Branch officials in my Department. This service can be accessed using the contact details listed in the "Thinking Rural: The Essential Guide to Rural Proofing" booklet which is available on the DARD website. A review of the impact of rural proofing is planned for the latter part of this year.

DARD: Transfer of Functions to Local Government

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, for each of the last five years, to detail the functions that (i) have been transferred; and (ii) are planned to be transferred from her Department to local councils, and of these, to detail (a) the reason behind the transfer of each function; (b) whether additional funding was offered to local councils to assist them in carrying out the functions; and (c) the cost, to her Department, of the final year when each of the functions were the responsibility of her Department; and (iii) may be transferred from her Department to local councils at a future date,
(AQW 6396/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In relation to part (i) of your question, I can confirm that there were no departmental functions transferred to local councils in the past 5 years.

The tables below reflect departmental functions that are planned to be or may be transferred to local councils at a future date:-

(ii) Input covering the planned transfer of functions:

Description of function	Reason for transfer	Anticipated date of transfer
Welfare of Animals – A new Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011 has been introduced with new powers for non-farmed animals. The Act defines that enforcement of these powers will be the responsibility of Council Inspectors.	These new powers will be introduced for the first time from April 2012 - this function has not previously been the responsibility of the Department. Annual funding of £760k was available in the DARD budget in 2011/12 to assist Councils to prepare for implementation. This funding will increase by £20k per annum for the following 3 years of the budget period to assist Councils in delivering their new animal welfare enforcement role in respect of non-farmed animals.	April 2012

(iii) - input covering functions which may be transferred at a future date:

Description of function for transfer at a future date	Reason for transfer	Anticipated date of transfer
Animal Welfare licensing and registration functions involving non-farmed animals	As Councils will have responsibility under the new Welfare of Animals Act for enforcement in respect of non-farmed animals responsibility for licensing and registration functions for activities involving non-farmed animals (including for example, pet shops and riding establishments) will transfer to Councils. This is intended to provide clear demarcation lines so members of the public know who to report an animal welfare issue to.	Subordinate legislation on licensing, registration and fees in relation to pet shops etc., will be brought forward in 2012/13.

DARD: 0845 Numbers

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much revenue has been raised by her Department in each of the last three financial years by the usage of 0845 numbers.
(AQW 6438/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As part of DARD's call management project, function based numbers with a 0845 prefix were adopted by my Department in 2008.

My Department has generated no revenue in the past three years from the use of these 0845 prefix numbers. There has been a small monthly cost to DARD for the use of the numbers based on the number of call minutes.

The 0845 prefix numbers used by my Department are being replaced by 0300 prefix numbers later this year in line with the NI Direct contact number protocol.

Dogs: Attacks on People

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many dog attacks on people were reported in each council area in 2011.
(AQW 6448/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Please see the table below which details the number of dog attacks on people investigated by each Council for the period from 1 January 2011 to 31 December 2011.

Council	Incidents investigated
Antrim	22
Ards	31
Armagh	41
Ballymena	14
Ballymoney	11
Banbridge	30
Belfast	122
Carrickfergus	18
Castlereagh	30
Coleraine	19
Cookstown	16
Craigavon	29
Derry	60
Down	68
Dungannon	45
Fermanagh	22
Larne	1
Limavady	18
Lisburn	51
Magherafelt	7
Moyle	1
Newry	157
Newtownabbey	24
North Down	60
Omagh	8
Strabane	4
Total	**909**

Trade Unions: Funding

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the level of funding her Department allocated to each trade union in the (i) 2000/01; (ii) 2005/06; and (iii) 2010/11 financial years.
(AQW 6494/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department does not directly allocate funds to any trade union.

However, as part of the NICS Central Whitley arrangements, a small representative number of staff from DARD are attached to NIPSA through the Seconded Officers Scheme, and the Department meets the salary costs of these staff.

The level of gross salary paid by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for full time seconded officers to NIPSA in the financial years for which the information is available is £99,594 and £146,322 for 2005/06 and 2010/11 respectively.

The Department does not retain records for the 2000/01 financial year.

DARD: Civil Servants from the Foyle Constituency who Work in Greater Belfast

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the total number of civil servants in her Department who live in the Foyle constituency and travel to work in the Greater Belfast area; and the total cost to her Department of subsidising the travel.
(AQW 6513/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Although there are currently 5 staff in DARD who travel to work in the Greater Belfast area from the Derry area, the Department has incurred no costs in respect of excess fares for subsidising travel during the period 1 January 2011 to 30 November 2011.

Farms: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farms there are in North Down.
(AQW 6844/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The June 2010 Agricultural Census found 64 farm businesses in the North Down District Council area. Data for 2011 are published on the DARD website on 31 January 2012.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Sport: Lottery Funding

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding opportunities exist for sporting interests that, on principle, decline to accept lottery funding; and for her assessment of whether there is a gap in such funding provision.
(AQW 6455/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): If a group or individual decides not to apply for lottery funding because of moral, conscientious or religious objections, this is a decision they take for themselves. No separate fund exists for sporting interests that, on principle, decline to accept lottery funding.

However, Sport NI have a wide range of exchequer funded programmes which provide significant opportunities to sporting groups. The majority of Sport NI awards are made from that funding source.

Trade Unions: Funding

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the level of funding her Department allocated to each trade union in the (i) 2000/01; (ii) 2005/06; and (iii) 2010/11 financial years.
(AQW 6495/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In the financial years 2000/01, 2005/06 and 2010/11 the Department did not directly fund any trade union.

Arts Council Funding: Braid Centre, Ballymena

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what conditions were attached to the funding, given by the Arts Council to the Braid Centre, in Ballymena in relation to keeping the facility a neutral and shared space and welcoming to all.
(AQW 6501/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Braid Arts Centre is owned and operated by Ballymena Borough Council.

The Arts Council (ACNI) provided Lottery funding of £2m for the construction of the Centre which opened in 2008. Since then ACNI has not allocated any grants to Ballymena Borough Council.

A basic condition of all Lottery funding is that projects supported must be open and accessible to all sections of the community.

Flags and Symbols: Braid Centre, Ballymena

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether the Arts Council has been informed by Ballymena Borough Council of the plans to erect flags and symbols in the Braid Centre, Ballymena; and what action the Arts Council intends to take.
(AQW 6502/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: ACNI was contacted by Ballymena Borough Council after it made its decision regarding flags and symbols and will be meeting with representatives of the Borough Council in the near future to discuss the issue.

Arts Council: Policy to Withdraw Funding

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether it is Arts Council policy to withdraw funding for facilities if the conditions that are attached to funding are not adhered to.
(AQW 6503/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: All Arts Council contracts contain clauses relating to withholding of funds or claw back of funds if an organisation breaches any condition of grant. It would be Arts Council policy to investigate any breach and seek to rectify the situation.

DCAL: Civil Servants from the Foyle Constituency who Work in Greater Belfast

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the total number of civil servants in her Department who live in the Foyle constituency and travel to work in the Greater Belfast area; and the total cost to her Department of subsidising the travel.
(AQW 6514/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In my Department there are currently no civil servants who live in the Foyle constituency and travel to work in the Greater Belfast area.

Therefore the cost to DCAL of subsidising the travel is Nil.

Fishing: Bag Nets Operated off the County Antrim Coast

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether there is any distinction in what is permitted or licensed in catching salmon in the bag nets which are operated off the County Antrim coast compared to landing salmon on shore.
(AQW 6518/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Bag nets which are operated off the County Antrim coast are connected to the shore. Salmon are removed from the sea end of the net by a boat and carcasses must be tagged when the fish are landed.

Drift nets are curtains of mesh deployed from a boat further off shore and after a period of passive fishing are hauled back to the boat and taken on board. Fish are removed from the nets and must be tagged before being landed.

Fishing: Bag and Drift Net Operations off the County Antrim Coast

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action has been taken, in the last three years, to advance the buy-out of the bag and drift net operations off the County Antrim coast.
(AQW 6519/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There has been no further action taken by the Department in the last three years, regarding a buy-out of the bag and drift net operations off the County Antrim coast.

Fishing: Bag and Drift Net Operations off the County Antrim Coast

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether there is provision, in the present budget, for the buy-out of the bag and drift net operations off the County Antrim coast.
(AQW 6520/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There is currently no provision set aside in the present budget for any potential buy-out of the bag and drift net licence holders off the Co Antrim coast.

Fishing: Bag and Drift Net Operations off the County Antrim Coast

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what communications her Department has had with the EU Commission, over the last five years, in relation to the bag and drift net operations off the County Antrim coast.
(AQW 6521/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department has no direct communication with the EU Commission regarding bag and draft net operations off the County Antrim coast.

The EU Commission communicates directly with British Government Departments, which relay information and request to the appropriate Departments in the devolved administrations. Responses are again channelled through British Government Departments.

Fishing: Bag and Drift Net Operations off the County Antrim Coast

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what information her Department holds, for the last five years, on the rivers to which salmon were returning before they were caught in the bag and drift net operations off the County Antrim coast.
(AQW 6522/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: For a number of years DCAL has monitored salmon stocks in rivers in its jurisdiction and has commissioned AFBI to carry out scientific research and analysis of data. One of the major outputs of this work is the determination of Conservation Limits (CL) for each of 6 Index Rivers. The CLs are expressed in terms of the number of eggs (ova) required for deposition in gravels to fill the available juvenile habitat on hatching.

The CLs for Index Rivers in the DCAL area are shown in the table below:

River	Region	CL ova deposition range (000's ova)
Bush	Northern	2310
Glendun	Northern	361-540
Shimna	South east	209-314
Main	Lough Neagh	2184-3265
Blackwater	Lough Neagh	1725-2578
Garvary	South West	84-125

The table below indicates the percentage compliance with the CLs for each of the past five years.

River	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Bush	83	170	103	62	56
Glendun	57	77	96	33	64
Shimna	40	47	40	12	76
Main	42	96	170	68	61
Blackwater	32	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Garvary	n/a	101	n/a	n/a	n/a

n/a = data not available

The Department also commissioned AFBI to carry out field work and research to establish the rivers of origin of the salmon taken by the DCAL licensed fishing engines off the County Antrim coast. This has determined that these nets are intercepting mixed stocks of salmon from the following rivers:

DCAL area:

Shimna	Upper Bann	Northern Lough Neagh Rivers
Lower Bann	Blackwater	Carey
Glendun	Glenarm	Bush

Loughs Agency area:

North Foyle	West Foyle	South East Foyle

Fishing: Licences for the Salmon Nets on the North Antrim Coast

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when the licences for the six remaining salmon nets on the North Antrim Coast expire; and whether she intends to renew these licences.
(AQW 6650/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The six coastal salmon net licences issued by DCAL expired on 31 December 2011.

The Department is currently considering applications received for the 2012 season.

Fishing: Illegal or Unlicensed Nets

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 5736/11-15, which section of the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966 covers the sending of warning letters; and to specify the offences for which warning letters have been sent.
(AQW 6689/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The issue of warning letters is not covered under any section of the 1966 Fisheries Act. The Department has developed enforcement policy to include the option of a written warning as an alternative to prosecution in certain defined circumstances.

Warning letters may be issued where there is evidence that an offence has been committed, the offender has fully co-operated in the investigation and there are extenuating circumstances such as age (juveniles or the elderly) or a disability.

The Department is generally reluctant to prosecute juveniles, which would result in a criminal record that could impact on or impede their future career and development opportunities.

In each of the three cases referred to in AQW/5736/11-15 the written warnings were issued for placement of a net within the defined mouth of a river.

DCAL: Legislative Programme

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 4123/11-15, when her Department will submit its legislative proposals to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.
(AQW 6837/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have submitted my proposals for primary legislation to the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Department of Education

Community Relations, Equality and Diversity

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of his Department's Community Relations, Equality and Diversity policy in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6228/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): My Department has spent the following on community relations and the new Community Relations, Equality and Diversity (CRED) policy over the last five years:

	Community Relations	Transition Phase	CRED
2007/08	£3.9m		
2008/09	£3.5m		
2009/10	£3.6m		
2010/11		£1.1m	
2011/12			£1.1m

The previous community relations schemes ended in March 2010 and the 2010/11 financial year was used as a transition period to run-down existing programmes and prepare educators for the implementation of the new CRED policy. The CRED policy was launched in March 2011 and as such, three years costs are not yet available.

Community Relations: Spend

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how much his Department has spent on community relations in each of the last five years.
(AQW 6230/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has spent the following on community relations and the new Community Relations, Equality and Diversity (CRED) policy over the last five years:

	Community Relations	Transition Phase	CRED
2007/08	£3.9m		
2008/09	£3.5m		
2009/10	£3.6m		
2010/11		£1.1m	
2011/12			£1.1m

The previous community relations schemes ended in March 2010 and the 2010/11 financial year was used as a transition period to run-down existing programmes and prepare educators for the implementation of the new CRED policy. The CRED policy was launched in March 2011 and as such, three years costs are not yet available.

Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit: Phase 2 Report

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education when the Phase 2 Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit report on his Department will be published.
(AQW 6232/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have previously given a commitment to publish the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit reports on Home to School Transport and School Meals after they were finalised. I met recently with the Finance Minister to discuss the reports and expect to share them with the Education Committee and with other key stakeholders, very shortly, after which they will be published on the Department of Education's website.

Quangos

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education how many quangos are currently operating under his Department.
(AQW 6235/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There are 12 currently operating, as follows:

- Belfast Education & Library Board
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
- Exceptional Circumstances Body
- General Teaching Council for NI
- Middletown Centre for Autism Ltd
- NI Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
- North Eastern Education & Library Board
- South Eastern Education & Library Board
- Southern Education & Library Board
- Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards
- Western Education & Library Board
- Youth Council for NI

Coláiste Feirste, Belfast

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the recent ruling in relation to Coláiste Feirste, Belfast.
(AQW 6276/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: This is a significant and important judgment which requires careful and detailed consideration before I can be in a position to provide an overall assessment on the outcome.

In line with the court judgment, Department officials are currently re-examining the transport arrangements for pupils travelling to Coláiste Feirste and will in the near future bring recommendations to me for consideration.

School Maintenance: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of maintenance repairs that are programmed for schools in the North Down area, in each of the next three years.
(AQW 6291/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) has responsibility for maintenance in the controlled and maintained school sectors in the North Down area. The Board has discretion to decide the amounts, from within their overall budget allocations, it will attribute to maintenance based on other competing priorities.

As allocations are made on an annual basis SEELB has confirmed it is not in a position to provide a programme for maintenance repairs for North Down over the next three years.

Age-weighted Pupil Unit: Cash Value

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education how the estimated figure of a five percent reduction in the cash value of the Age Weighted Pupil Unit for 2012/13, referred to in his Department's letter to schools on 25 November 2011, was arrived at, given the one percent reduction in current expenditure set out in Table 3.1 of the Budget 2011-15 for the corresponding financial year.[R]
(AQW 6292/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The funding which goes directly to schools - the Aggregated Schools Budget (ASB) - forms approximately 60% of the Department's overall Resource Budget, as detailed in Table 3.1 of the Budget 2011-15.

The ASB is distributed to schools using the Common Funding Formula, as outlined in the Common Funding Scheme. The details of the Scheme are available from the Departmental website. Around 80% of most schools' core funding is from the Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU). The estimated cash value of the AWPU reflects the overall level of funding available in the ASB, a range of estimated demographic values and anticipated increased needs within the 'non AWPU' funding factors. On 25 November 2011

my officials wrote out to schools to notify them of the high level budget planning information then available for the next three financial years.

On 12 January, following talks convened by the First Minister and deputy First Minister, I announced an additional £120m for schools over the next 3 years. This is over and above the extra £40m that I reallocated to schools last November from within the then existing education budget. As a result of the additional £120m funding the estimated AWPU cash values have now changed. For your information the revised estimates are set out below:

	(Actual)	**Estimated**		
	2011/12	**2012/13**	**2013/14**	**2014/15**
AWPU Cash Value*	£2,041	£2,021	£1,981	£2,011
Change %*	-	(1.0)%	(2.0)%	1.5%

*rounded

These revised figures were notified to all schools by my officials on 16 January 2012.

While this is welcome news it is important to stress that these additional funds have alleviated rather than eradicated the financial pressures on schools. Even with this additional funding the Department faces a real terms reduction of £180m (9.2%) in resource funding by 2014/15, compared to the 2010/11 baseline. Hence it is very important that schools continue to address the pressures facing them and take necessary action to ensure that they live within budgets.

Age-weighted Pupil Unit: Cash Value

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education how the estimated figure of a one percent reduction in the cash value of the Age Weighted Pupil Unit for 2013/14, referred to in his Department's letter to schools on 25 November 2011, was arrived at, given the 0.6 percent increase in current expenditure set out in Table 3.1 of the Budget 2011-15 for the corresponding financial year.[R] **(AQW 6293/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd: The funding which goes directly to schools - the Aggregated Schools Budget (ASB) - forms approximately 60% of the Department's overall Resource Budget, as detailed in Table 3.1 of the Budget 2011-15.

The ASB is distributed to schools using the Common Funding Formula, as outlined in the Common Funding Scheme. The details of the Scheme are available from the Departmental website. Around 80% of most schools' core funding is from the Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU). The estimated cash value of the AWPU reflects the overall level of funding available in the ASB, a range of estimated demographic values and anticipated increased needs within the 'non AWPU' funding factors. On 25 November 2011 my officials wrote out to schools to notify them of the high level budget planning information then available for the next three financial years.

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Age-weighted Pupil Unit: Cash Value

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education how the estimated figure of a five percent reduction in the cash value of the Age Weighted Pupil Unit for 2014/15, referred to in his Department's letter to schools on 25 November 2011, was arrived at, given the 0.7 percent decrease in current expenditure set out in Table 3.1 of the Budget 2011-15 for the corresponding financial year. *[R]* **(AQW 6294/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd: The funding which goes directly to schools - the Aggregated Schools Budget (ASB) - forms approximately 60% of the Department's overall Resource Budget, as detailed in Table 3.1 of the Budget 2011-15.

The ASB is distributed to schools using the Common Funding Formula, as outlined in the Common Funding Scheme. The details of the Scheme are available from the Departmental website. Around 80% of most schools' core funding is from the Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU). The estimated cash value of the AWPU reflects the overall level of funding available in the ASB, a range of estimated demographic values and anticipated increased needs within the 'non AWPU' funding factors. On 25 November 2011 my officials wrote out to schools to notify them of the high level budget planning information then available for the next three financial years.

On 12 January, following talks convened by the First Minister and deputy First Minister, I announced an additional £120m for schools over the next 3 years. This is over and above the extra £40m that I reallocated to schools last November from within the then existing education budget. As a result of the additional £120m funding the estimated AWPU cash values have now changed. For your information the revised estimates are set out below:

	(Actual)	**Estimated**		
	2011/12	**2012/13**	**2013/14**	**2014/15**
AWPU Cash Value*	£2,041	£2,021	£1,981	£2,011
Change %*	-	(1.0)%	(2.0)%	1.5%

*rounded

These revised figures were notified to all schools by my officials on 16 January 2012.

While this is welcome news it is important to stress that these additional funds have alleviated rather than eradicated the financial pressures on schools. Even with this additional funding the Department faces a real terms reduction of £180m (9.2%) in resource funding by 2014/15, compared to the 2010/11 baseline. Hence it is very important that schools continue to address the pressures facing them and take necessary action to ensure that they live within budgets.

School Budgets: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education what plans his Department has to address any shortfalls in the budgets for schools in the North Down area in this financial year.
(AQW 6307/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: All schools receive a fully delegated budget under the Common Funding Scheme arrangements on an equitable basis, irrespective of geographical location.

As I announced on 12 January 2012, the Executive has agreed to provide the Education sector with £120m of additional funding, which will go straight to school budgets over the next three years.

Since being appointed Education Minister I have consistently highlighted the fact that that the education budget faces unprecedented financial challenges over the next three years. I have argued the case with Executive colleagues for further investment to help alleviate pressures on school budgets. I am, therefore, pleased that as a result of my raising these matters with the Executive the additional allocations over the next three years of £30m/£15m/£75m have been made.

Whilst this is welcome news it is important to stress that these additional funds have alleviated rather than eradicated the financial pressures on all schools. Even with this additional funding the Department faces a real terms reduction of £180m (9.2%) in resource funding by 2014/15, compared to the 2010/11 baseline. It will be important that schools, in conjunction with the Funding Authorities, review their financial plans to ensure that they operate within their delegated budgets.

My Statement in the Assembly on 26 September 2011: "Putting Pupils First: Shaping our Future" set out a significant programme of strategic transformational change involving the viability audit and area planning to ensure that we have an effective and efficient education system. In addition the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority will have a significant impact on the delivery of education services.

It is crucial that we continue to deliver these key strategic policy objectives and my clear intention is to work with all key stakeholders to ensure that these are fully delivered.

School Maintenance Budgets

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Education what are the implications resulting from the lack of capital spend on school maintenance budgets.
(AQW 6376/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I would point out that expenditure on maintenance comes from the resource budget and not the capital budget.

The Department provides funding to the Education and Library Boards for maintenance programmes through the block grant allocation. During this financial year, 2011-12 an additional £19.8 million of funding has been provided to support the maintenance programme for schools.

Any reduction in the budget available for maintenance obviously has implications for the pace at which planned maintenance can be undertaken. The Boards seek to prioritise all essential and response maintenance work ahead of planned maintenance programmes.

My Department continues to liaise with the Education and Library Boards on tackling the backlog of maintenance.

Teachers and other School Staff: Redundancies

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education for an estimate of the number of teacher, and other school staff, redundancies as a result of the cut in funding.
(AQW 6403/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Education faces significant challenges. The harsh reality is that the cuts imposed on this administration by the British Government have severely impacted upon schools' budgets. Although it is too early to predict the impact of the reduction in funding in terms of jobs, as over 80% of schools' expenditure is staff related there will inevitably be an impact on staff if costs are to be contained within budget.

However, it has always been my intention to protect frontline services as much as possible and the Executive has agreed to provide an additional £120m which will be allocated directly to schools over the budget period. In addition, I have already reallocated £40m into the Aggregated Schools' Budget to mitigate the impact on schools. These additional resources will help alleviate the burden on school budgets, but will not completely eradicate the pressures bearing down on schools.

I believe that through collaborative working between my Department, the employing authorities and the trades unions, redundancies can be managed, as far as possible, through a voluntary process. To this end I have provided additional funding to allow employing authorities to make enhanced severance payments to teachers made redundant at August 2012. I believe that this will encourage teachers to volunteer for redundancy and minimise the number of compulsory redundancies.

However the final decision for schools on how to live within their budget rests with the Principal and Board of Governors under the arrangements for Local Management of Schools. Hence it is both inappropriate and logistically impossible to anticipate the individual decisions made across 1,200 schools.

School Milk

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education what action his Department is taking to reduce the price of milk in schools, particularly for pupils from deprived backgrounds.
(AQW 6439/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: At present, free school milk is provided to all pupils at special schools, to pupils in nursery and primary schools who do not have access to school meals and to individual nursery and primary school pupils where it is deemed necessary in the interests of their health.

Subsidised milk is also available to all pupils through the EU School Milk Subsidy Scheme, which is administered by the Department Of Agriculture and Rural Development. The Education and Library Boards administer the Scheme and currently charge parents 16p per one third of a pint. It is a matter for individual schools to decide if they wish to participate in the scheme. I would encourage all parents to take advantage of the Scheme, where possible.

Milk and dairy products are excellent sources of nutrients such as calcium, protein and vitamins and, for this reason , they are included in the Department of Education's Nutritional Standards for School Lunches and for Other Food and Drinks in Schools. Every lunch served in school must contain at least one portion of food from the milk and dairy foods group and, in addition, drinking milk must be available as an option every day.

In light of the arrangements currently in place, and the many competing priorities within the education budget, a further subsidy for milk in schools would not represent the best use of resources.

Schools: Closures

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of schools in the (a) controlled; (b) maintained; (c) integrated; (d) voluntary grammar; and (e) Irish-medium sectors which have closed in each year since 2007; and (ii) the enrolment number in each school at the time of closure.
(AQW 6460/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

(i) There have been 51 school closures between 2007 and 2011. This total is broken down as follows:

- 33 Controlled schools
- 24 Primary schools. 8 in 2007, 6 in 2008, 3 in 2009, 3 in 2010 and 4 in 2011.
- 7 Post primary schools. 1 in 2007, 3 in 2008 and 3 in 2009
- 1 Nursery School in 2007 .
- 1 Special school in 2007.
- 12 Maintained schools

- 9 Primary schools. 1 in 2007, 4 in 2009, 2 in 2010 and 2 in 2011
- 2 Post primary schools. 1 in 2007 and 1 in 2008
- 1 Special school in 2009
- 3 Integrated schools
- 2 Controlled Integrated primary schools in 2008
- 1 Grant Maintained Integrated post primary school in 2009
- 2 Preparatory departments in 2011
- 1 Other Maintained primary school (Irish Medium) in 2008

Additionally, 31 schools have been closed due to amalgamations, between 2007 and 2011, to form 14 new schools. This total is broken down as follows:

- 14 Controlled schools
- 8 Primary schools. 2 in 2007 and 6 in 2008.
- 1 Post primary school in 2011.
- 5 Special schools in 2007.
- 14 Maintained schools
- 12 Primary schools. 6 in 2007, 2 in 2008 and 4 in 2011
- 2 Post primary schools in 2010.
- 2 Voluntary grammar schools. 1 in 2010 and 1 in 2011.
- 1 Other Maintained primary school in 2007.

(ii) A list of schools that have closed or amalgamated between 2007 and 2011 is included below and this includes detail of the school enrolment in the year of closure.

School Closures

Ref no	School Closed	Board	Type	Manage-ment	Date of closure	Enrolment in year of closure
311-6019	Ballycastle Nursery School	NEELB	Nursery	Controlled	31/08/07	26
301-6226	Ballyduff Primary School	NEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/07	24
401-1508	Charley Memorial Primary School	SEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/07	10
401-1686	Drumbo Primary School	SEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/07	12
501-2616	Eglish Primary School	SELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/07	11
401-3001	Groomsport Primary School	SEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/07	25
401-1648	Hillhall Primary School	SEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/07	39
401-1627	Lambeg Primary School	SEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/07	23
431-6546	Lindsay Hospital School	SEELB	Special	Controlled	31/08/07	0
121-0273	Mount Gilbert Community College	BELB	Secondary	Controlled	31/08/07	94
223-0141	St Joseph's High School Plumbridge	WELB	Secondary	Maintained	31/08/07	85
403-3029	St Mary's Primary School Ballygowan	SEELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/07	3
501-1618	Tullymacarette Primary School	SELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/07	14
121-0288	Balmoral High School	BELB	Secondary	Controlled	31/08/08	58
501-0988	Collone Primary School	SELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/08	24
401-3032	Conlig PS	SEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/08	43
425-0272	Down Academy	SEELB	Secondary	Controlled	31/08/08	240
104-6654	Gaelscoil an Damba	BELB	Primary	Other Maintained	31/08/08	29
403-1295	Guiness PS	SEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/08	18

Ref no	School Closed	Board	Type	Manage-ment	Date of closure	Enrolment in year of closure
405-3016	Kindle CIPS	SEELB	Primary	Controlled Integrated	31/08/08	32
421-0030	Lisnasharragh HS	SEELB	Secondary	Controlled	31/08/08	69
501-6109	Minterburn Primary School	SELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/08	11
201-1866	Shanmullagh PS	WELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/08	24
123-0032	St Gabriel's College	BELB	Secondary	Maintained	31/08/08	93
201-2709	Trillick PS	WELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/08	35
405-0618	Hilden Controlled Integrated PS	SEELB	Primary	Controlled Integrated	30/11/08	36
403-1693	St Colman's PS Moira	SEELB	Primary	Maintained	31/03/09	2
526-0307	Armagh Integrated College	SELB	Secondary	GMI	31/08/09	61
501-2451	Benburb PS	SELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/09	11
121-0258	Castle HS Belfast	BELB	Secondary	Controlled	31/08/09	62
421-0031	Donaghadee HS	SEELB	Secondary	Controlled	31/08/09	126
321-0090	Maghera HS	NEELB	Secondary	Controlled	31/08/09	133
401-1610	Newtownbreda PS	SEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/09	78
503-1155	St Colmcille's PS Armagh	SELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/09	15
203-2679	St Columba's PS Curley	WELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/09	16
133-6012	St Francis De Sales Special School	BELB	Special	Maintained	31/08/09	29
203-2716	St Patrick's PS Garvallagh	WELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/09	14
101-0863	Suffolk PS	BELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/09	76
301-6171	Ballee Primary School Ballymena	NEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/10	40
503-1658	St John's Primary School, Glenn, Newry	SELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/10	20
203-2681	St Patrick's PS, Creggan	WELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/10	12
101-0271	Beechfield Primary School, Belfast	BELB	Primary	Controlled	30/09/10	51
101-0283	Grove Primary School, Belfast	BELB	Primary	Controlled	15/10/10	31
162-0018	Bloomfield Collegiate School Prep Dept	BELB	Preparatory	Voluntary	31/08/11	9
462-0015	Connor House Preparatory Department	SEELB	Preparatory	Voluntary	31/08/11	85
401-1678	Ballycloughan Primary School, Saintfield	SEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/11	17
501-2659	Clogher Regional Primary School	SELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/11	12
401-3309	Derriaghy Primary School	SEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/11	40
101-0321	Vere Foster PS, Belfast	BELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/11	41
303-0836	Braid Primary School, Broughshane	NEELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/11	16
303-6093	Lourdes Primary School, Whitehead	NEELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/11	20

School Amalgamations

Ref no	School Amalgamated	Board	Type	Manage-ment	Date of closure	Enrolment in year of closure
303-0888	St Louis' PS	NEELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/07	284
303-6250	St Joseph's PS		Primary	Maintained		73
303-6128	St Mary's PS		Primary	Maintained		45
303-3302	All Saints, PS Ballymena *(Formed 2 new schools)*		Primary	Maintained		216
331-6272	Beechgrove Special School	NEELB	Special	Controlled	31/08/07	24
331-6271	Dunfane Special School		Special	Controlled		154
331-6511	Loughan Special School		Special	Controlled		77
401-1582	Crossgar PS	SEELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/07	52
404-1545	Drumaghlis PS		Primary	Other Maint.		36
503-1171	St Joseph's, PS Poyntzpass	SELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/07	96
503-1182	St James' PS, Tandragee		Primary	Maintained		14
231-0007	Limegrove Special School	WELB	Special	Controlled	31/08/07	70
231-6526	Glasvey Special School		Special	Controlled		15
201-2228	Dungiven PS *(Closed as first phase of the amalgamation of Burnfoot PS, Dungiven PS and Largy PS)*	WELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/07	17
101-0289	Sydenham Infants' PS	BELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/08	126
101-0231	Strand PS, Belfast		Primary	Controlled		180
303-6072	St Joseph's PS, Ahoghill	NEELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/08	18
303-0889	St Patrick's PS Aughtercloney		Primary			5
501-6195	Killyman PS	SELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/08	92
501-2629	Tamnamore PS, Dungannon		Primary	Controlled		23
201-2276	Burnfoot PS	WELB	Primary	Controlled	31/08/08	58
201-2058	Largy PS, Limavady *(Dungiven PS closed 31/08/2007 as first phase of amalgamation)*		Primary	Controlled		33
342-0094	St McNissi's College	NEELB	Post Primary	Voluntary	29/03/10	609
323-0066	St Comgall's HS		Post Primary	Maintained		153
323-0019	St Aloysius HS		Post Primary	Maintained		43
103-6091	St John the Baptist Girls PS	BELB	Primary	Maintained	28/02/11	215
103-6092	St John the Baptist Boys PS		Primary	Maintained		218
403-1644	St Patrick's Boys PS	SEELB	Primary	Maintained	31/08/11	254
403-1384	Convent of Mercy PS Downpatrick		Primary	Maintained		150

Ref no	School Amalgamated	Board	Type	Manage-ment	Date of closure	Enrolment in year of closure
241-0096	Strabane Grammar	WELB	Post Primary	Voluntary	31/08/11	406
221-0164	Strabane High			Controlled		276

STEM Subjects: Importance

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for his Department's assessment of the importance of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics subjects.
(AQW 6463/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The promotion of STEM subjects is important to our future economic growth and, as Education Minister, I am committed to playing my part and my Department is undertaking a wide range of interventions to ensure that STEM subjects are seen as exciting, stimulating and fulfilling and also to link the Mathematics element into our work to improve standards of numeracy (and literacy) for all our young people.

The study of science, technology and mathematics subjects is embedded in the Revised Curriculum, which is now in place in all grant aided schools across the north of Ireland and provides much greater freedom for teachers to explore STEM-related learning with pupils in an interesting and innovative way.

The Entitlement Framework, which will be implemented by September 2015, will guarantee all post primary pupils aged 14 and above greater choice and flexibility of courses regardless of the school in which they are enrolled. This increased choice is being supported with improved careers education, information, advice and guidance, again with a particular focus on STEM-related career opportunities.

The promotion of STEM subjects is one of my Department's priorities and since the publication of the Report of the STEM Review, my Department has also commissioned and is supporting a wide range of additional initiatives beyond the delivery of the statutory curriculum, aimed at encouraging an increase in the uptake of STEM subjects in schools here.

STEM Subjects: Primary Schools

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what plans he has to extend the delivery of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics subjects to primary schools.
(AQW 6464/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Revised Curriculum, which is now in place in all grant aided primary schools, provides much greater freedom for teachers to explore STEM-related learning with pupils. Mathematics, science and technology are compulsory elements of the revised primary curriculum with science and technology covered through The World Around Us area of learning.

Since the publication of the Report of the STEM Review, my Department has been and continues to take significant action on a number of fronts aimed specifically at primary schools to engage primary pupils with STEM in an interesting and exciting way. These include: annual funding to Sentinus to deliver a suite of primary STEM programmes, including the successful annual Sentinus Young Innovators event; a new pilot programme 'Smart Gear' to enhance STEM based learning at Key Stage 2 involving over 700 pupils from 35 primary schools; 'Promoting STEM in Primary Schools' project which has developed a series of Key Stage 2 case studies and thematic units to improve teachers' and pupils' understanding of connections between STEM school-based learning and the STEM 'world of work'; and a 'STEM Primary Professional Development Project' which enables primary school teachers to act as 'STEM Teacher Developers' trained to provide a range of STEM professional development activities to teachers across a cluster of local primary schools.

Trade Unions: Funding

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Education to detail the level of funding his Department allocated to each trade union in the (i) 2000/01; (ii) 2005/06; and (iii) 2010/11 financial years.
(AQW 6465/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education does not allocate funding to any trade union.

DE: Civil Servants from the Foyle Constituency who Work in Greater Belfast

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Education to detail the total number of civil servants in his Department who live in the Foyle constituency and travel to work in the Greater Belfast area; and the total cost to his Department for subsidising the travel.
(AQW 6470/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Currently, there are no DE staff living in the Foyle constituency who travel to work in the Greater Belfast area. There are 120 DE staff who work in Waterside House which is located in the Foyle constituency.

Redburn Primary School, Holywood: Development Proposal

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education when a decision will be taken by his Department on the development proposal for Redburn Primary School, Holywood.
(AQW 6482/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Development Proposal for the closure of Redburn Primary School was published on 20 December 2011 and is now in the statutory 2 month consultation period which ends on 20 February 2012. Following this, I will make a decision within the context of stated priorities and policies, taking account of all pertinent information and comments received.

My Department will endeavour to complete the process and notify the proposer of the decision within 4 – 6 weeks of the close of the statutory consultation period.

Youth Service: Capital Funding

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education to detail the level of capital funding that was available for Youth Services in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6490/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The capital budget allocated for youth services in each of the last three financial years was as follows:

2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
£5,016,000	£8,015,000	£4,602,000

Youth Service: Capital Spend

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education what is the projected capital spend on Youth Services in (i) this financial year; and (ii) the next two financial years.
(AQW 6491/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The projected capital spend for Youth Services this financial year is £4.274million. The Budget 2010 indicative Youth Services capital budget is £5million in each of the next two years. The actual allocation of future years' capital budgets will be made, with my approval, following consultation with the various capital budget stakeholders.

Council for Catholic Maintained Schools

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education why there was an increase of 51.7 percent in the staff complement of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools between 2002/03 and 2009/10.
(AQW 6533/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information on which this percentage increase is based did not differentiate between full-time and part-time equivalent staff numbers.

In 2002/03, the full-time equivalent staff was 47.755, and in 2009/10 it was 59.913, which equates to an increase of 25.49%. This increase was due to the number of part-time staff employed by CCMS over this period. Extra staff were required as a result of the additional responsibilities of CCMS regarding the re-organisation of the post-primary estate and the implementation of the Entitlement Framework.

Currently CCMS have 57 staff on their payroll which equates to 51 full-time equivalent posts.

Council for Catholic Maintained Schools

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what discussions have been held with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools in relation to the delivery of financial savings.
(AQW 6537/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The delivery of financial savings for the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools is closely monitored by my Department. Discussions have been undertaken via a range of meetings held with Departmental officials during the year. The meetings referred to have included:

- Governance and Accountability meetings with the CCMS Chief Executive;
- One to one meetings with the Finance Officer of CCMS;
- Ad-hoc meetings on request to discuss budgetary issues in the context of the delivery of financial savings or other financial matters.

Sustainable Schools Policy

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what weight is given to each of the six criteria set out in the Sustainable Schools Policy when considering a development proposal to close a school.
(AQW 6549/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The six criteria and their associated quantitative and qualitative indicators (set out in Annex A to the Sustainable Schools Policy) provide a framework for assessing the range of factors which may affect a school's sustainability.

No weightings are attached to either the criteria or indicators as the intention is not to have a mechanistic application of the criteria and indicators, but to provide a view of how effectively a school is functioning and of the range of factors affecting its performance.

The policy document notes that "difficulties with one or more factors should draw attention to the need for a more detailed review and evaluation". It also notes that the local circumstances of each individual school will need to be considered in determining what action should be taken, and that, as a result, each case should continue to be assessed individually. When I make decisions on development proposals for closure, therefore, I do so on a case by case basis, taking into account all pertinent information. The over-riding consideration is the quality of education that a school provides for the children.

Age-weighted Pupil Unit: Funding

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education what is the planned Age Weighted Pupil Unit funding for the (i) 2011/12; (ii) 2012/13; and (iii) 2013/14 financial years for primary and post-primary school pupils.
(AQW 6553/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Having consistently highlighted the pressures on the Education Budget, I was pleased to announce on the 12 January that the Executive had agreed to provide additional funding of £120m to help alleviate the pressures on school budgets. While these additional funds are very welcome, it is important to highlight that the Aggregated Schools Budget (ASB) will still be lower, in cash terms in 2012/13 and 2013/14, than the actual funding available in the current financial year.

The Common Funding Formula distributes the ASB to the 1,150 grant-aided schools in the north. Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) funding is determined by the amount of the ASB available and the numbers and profiles of pupils. The resulting 'cash value' for an AWPU is then multiplied by appropriate weightings to provide the core 'per pupil' funding element of a school's delegated budget.

The only AWPU figures which can be confirmed, at this time, are those for the current 2011/12 financial year. However, on the basis of current estimated cash values, and no changes being applied to the current pupil group weightings, the table below provides for primary and post primary pupils the actual cash values for 2011/12 and estimates for 2012/13 and 2013/14.

Year		AWPU Cash value £	Illustrative funding for year groups		
			Primary Yr 1-7	Post-primary Yr 8-12	Post-primary Yr 13-14
2011/2	Actual	2,041	2,163	3,429	4,449
2012/13	Estimated	2,021	2,142	3,395	4,406
2013/14	Estimated	1,981	2,100	3,328	4,319

Area Planning: Terms of Reference

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) any work his Department has carried out on investigating the various models of education provision outlined in the terms of reference for Area Planning; and (ii) whether his Department has researched the different education models that have been developed in the Republic of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and England.
(AQW 6559/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Terms of Reference for the area planning process were issued on 15 December 2011. These specify the key objective to develop a network of sustainable and viable schools that can fully meet the educational needs of all of our young people into the future.

These also invite the school managing authorities to consider and develop, where appropriate, realistic, innovative and creative solutions to address need, including opportunities for shared schooling on a cross sectoral basis reflecting local circumstances.

I have also given a commitment in the draft Programme for Government to establish a Ministerial advisory group to explore and bring forward recommendations before the end of 2012/13 to advance shared education. I aim to establish this group by 1 April 2012. This will involve examining a range of models including, as appropriate, practice in other jurisdictions, and will inform and support the work on area planning.

Irish-medium Primary School in Dungiven

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education, in light of the recent advertisement by the Western Education and Library Board, in relation to the establishment of a controlled Irish-medium primary school in Dungiven, on what evidence is the projected long-term enrolment based.
(AQW 6562/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Development Proposal for the establishment of Gaelscoil Neachtain in Dungiven was published by the Western Education and Library Board on 9 January 2012. The publication triggered a statutory 2-month period during which comments and objections may be offered to the Department. After this 2-month period has expired, officials will present all pertinent information, including evidence of demand, for my consideration and decision.

I understand that it is intended that the new Gaelscoil will replace the unit currently located at St Canice's Primary School in Dungiven which currently has 60 pupils enrolled. The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools intends to bring forward a separate development proposal for the closure of this unit.

In line with the Sustainable Schools policy, the requirement for recognition as a grant-aided school, and therefore eligibility for recurrent funding, is that schools in rural areas such as Dungiven will meet minimum annual Year 1 intake of 12 pupils in the first year, rising to 15 pupils in subsequent years. This equates to a school of 105 pupils over seven years in line with the minimum thresholds stated in the Sustainable Schools Policy.

Youth Service: Capital Funding

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education when the funding for the capital grants schemes for youth services will be released by his Department.
(AQW 6564/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am currently considering funding for a capital grant scheme for youth services in line with other capital commitments and priorities.

DE: Budget Reductions

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Education, for the 2011-15 budget period, to detail all budget reductions over £1,000, broken down by (i) the name of the item; (ii) the amount of the reduction; and (iii) the reduction as a percentage of the previous funding awarded.
(AQW 6565/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Budget 2011-15 outcome for education has produced major challenges as the level of funding available over the period 2011-12 to 2014-15 is less than what had previously been in place. The shortfall between the Department's anticipated spending requirements and the Budget 2011-15 outcome was some £101m/ £187m/ £229m/ £306m. At that time, a Savings Delivery Plan was developed to deliver the reductions necessary to ensure that the Department remained within budget. On 12 January 2012, following talks convened by the First Minister and deputy First Minister, I announced an additional £120m for schools over the next 3 years. This is over and above the extra £40m that I reallocated to schools last November from within the then existing education budget. As a result of this additional funding, the reductions necessary are now £101m/ £147m/ £199m/ £216m. Details of the information requested is set out below.

		Amount of Reduction			
Area Of Reduction	**2010/11 Baseline**	**2011/12 £m**	**2012/13 £m**	**2013/14 £m**	**2014/15 £m**
Schools Delegated Budget	**1,127.0**				
Aggregated Schools Budget		26.6	45.2	84.1	89.9
% of 2010/11 baseline		2.4	4.0	7.5	8.0
Teacher Substitution Costs		2.1	3.7	3.9	4.0
% of 2010/11 baseline		0.2	0.3	0.3	0.4
Procurement Goods & Services and Energy		2.9	5.8	8.7	11.6
% of 2010/11 baseline		0.3	0.5	0.8	1.0
ELB Block Grant	**399.8**				
Home to School Transport		5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0
% of 2010/11 baseline		1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3

Area Of Reduction	2010/11 Baseline	Amount of Reduction			
		2011/12 £m	2012/13 £m	2013/14 £m	2014/15 £m
Professional Support for Schools		2.6	17.6	17.6	17.6
% of 2010/11 baseline		0.6	4.4	4.4	4.4
ELB Centre Resource Budget Efficiencies		2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
% of 2010/11 baseline		0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
ALB Admin & Management Costs		12.5	12.5	12.5	12.5
% of 2010/11 baseline		3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1
Procurement Goods & Services and Energy		2.1	4.2	6.3	8.4
% of 2010/11 baseline		0.5	1.1	1.6	2.1
Teacher Substitution Costs		0.9	1.5	1.6	1.6
% of 2010/11 baseline		0.2	0.4	0.4	0.4
School Meals Service (ELB School-related Centre Resource Budget)		0.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
% of 2010/11 baseline		0.0	0.3	0.3	0.3
Primary Principals - Transfer Interviews (ELB School-related Centre Resource Budget)		0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
% of 2010/11 baseline		0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
ICT in Schools	**50.8**				
Classroom 2000		12.0	16.0	16.0	16.0
% of 2010/11 baseline		23.6	31.5	31.5	31.5
Professional Support for Schools	**20.2**				
School Improvement Programme		6.2	6.2	6.2	6.2
% of 2010/11 baseline		30.5	30.5	30.5	30.5
Regional Training Unit		0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
% of 2010/11 baseline		1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1
Curriculum Development		6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0
% of 2010/11 baseline		29.6	29.6	29.6	29.6
Newcomers		0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
% of 2010/11 baseline		0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4
Voluntary Grammar and GMI Schools Support Costs	**23.6**				
Entitlement Framework		0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7
% of 2010/11 baseline		3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1
Teacher Substitution Costs		0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1
% of 2010/11 baseline		0.2	0.3	0.3	0.4
CCMS	**4.1**				
Entitlement Framework		0.3	0.6	0.6	0.6
% of 2010/11 baseline		6.9	13.8	13.8	13.8

Area Of Reduction	2010/11 Baseline	Amount of Reduction			
		2011/12 £m	2012/13 £m	2013/14 £m	2014/15 £m
ALB Admin & Management Costs		0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4
% of 2010/11 baseline		10.8	10.8	10.8	10.8
Entitlement Framework	**18.3**				
ELB Earmarked Funding		4.9	6.6	12.6	18.2
% of 2010/11 baseline		27.1	36.3	69.1	99.6
NICIE - Entitlement Framework		0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1
% of 2010/11 baseline		0.1	0.3	0.3	0.3
CnaG - Entitlement Framework		0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
% of 2010/11 baseline		0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
AccessNI Costs	**1.2**				
AccessNI		1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
% of 2010/11 baseline		86.7	86.7	86.7	86.7
Capacity Building	**8.3**				
Capacity Building		3.8	3.8	4.8	4.8
% of 2010/11 baseline		45.8	45.8	57.8	57.8
ALB Admin & Management Costs	**51.3**				
CCEA		1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1
% of 2010/11 baseline		2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2
Staff Commission		0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
% of 2010/11 baseline		0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
ELBs Youth		0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8
% of 2010/11 baseline		1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6
Youth Council		0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
% of 2010/11 baseline		0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
GTCNI	**1.2**				
GTCNI		1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
% of 2010/11 baseline		83.9	83.9	83.9	83.9
Departmental Administration (incl ESAIT)	**32.7**				
Departmental Administration		2.7	3.2	3.7	4.2
% of 2010/11 baseline		8.3	9.8	11.3	12.9
Funding for RPA Institutions	**2.9**				
RPA Institutions		2.9	0.0	0.0	0.0
% of 2010/11 baseline		100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total Reductions		**101.5**	**146.9**	**198.6**	**215.7**

School-based Counselling

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) what accreditation is required for counsellors to work in primary schools; (ii) for his assessment of the effectiveness of school-based counselling; and (iii) what organisations are currently providing counselling in primary schools.
(AQW 6566/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not make provision for counselling support, which is independent of the school, on a universal access basis in primary schools. The Independent Counselling Service for Schools (ICSS) currently provides support to pupils in grant-aided post primary schools and to young people of post primary age in special schools.

The ICSS provides counselling support to primary age pupils, when required, as part of the response to a critical incident. Primary schools can make arrangements to provide counselling support from within their own resources and the Department encourages the use of ICSS service standards.

All counsellors employed in ICSS must be qualified to at least Diploma level in counselling and have a minimum of 150 hours clinically supervised practice before starting work in a school. The Diploma in Counselling or equivalent should be from a recognised validating organisation e.g. Central School for Counsellor Training (CSCT), Counselling and Psychotherapy Central Awarding Body (CPCAB) or such a qualification from a third level establishment. Counsellors should hold or be working towards the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) or Irish Association for Counselling and Therapy (IACT) or equivalent accreditation.

The evidential base in support of school based counselling is very strong both locally and internationally. The most recent independent evaluation of the ICSS was undertaken by the Education and Training Inspectorate and was published in June 2009. The report confirmed the benefits of access to counselling for pupils and its value to schools. Some of the key findings were that:-

- there is an increasing demand and need by young people for a counselling service in most of the schools participating in the evaluation; the inspectors endorse the Department's policy of providing a counselling service to post-primary schools;
- the pupils valued the independence of the counsellor, separate from the school staff, giving greater freedom to discuss 'personal', embarrassing and more personal issues; and
- the schools valued the expertise of the counsellors and particularly their skills in identifying individual pupils whose personal safety is at high risk.

The Department does not collect information about counselling services in primary schools. However, it is widely known that organisations such as Barnardo's, New Life Counselling and Familyworks as well as a number of self-employed counsellors provide services to primary schools.

School-based Counselling

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education how many primary schools offer school-based counselling; and what is the timescale for extending school-based counselling to all primary schools.
(AQW 6568/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not make provision for counselling support, which is independent of the school, on a universal access basis in primary schools. Any expansion of the Independent Counselling Service for Schools into the primary sector would require additional resources which are not available at present.

Counselling support is made available to primary age pupils as part of the response to a critical incident.

Schools, including primary schools, can provide counselling support from within their own resources. Some primary schools have access to resources from initiatives such as Neighbourhood Renewal and use these to purchase counselling support. The Department does not collect information from primary schools about the provision made.

Achieving Belfast Programme and Bright Futures Programme

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Achieving Belfast programme and the similar Bright Futures programme in the Londonderry area, including costs.
(AQW 6605/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In 2011/12, the Department provided funding of £360,000 to both the BELB and the WELB in support of the Achieving Belfast and Achieving Derry-Bright Futures programmes. This was a similar level of support to previous years.

Through these programmes, the BELB and the WELB are continuing to support the participating schools in their work to tackle underachievement and raise standards, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

An Evaluation of the Early Progress of the Achieving Belfast and Achieving Derry-Bright Futures programmes was published by the Education and Training Inspectorate in May 2010. The evaluation report highlighted strengths in both programmes, as well as areas for improvement, which the BELB and WELB are continuing to address.

While the schools have made progress, there is still much work to be done to raise standards further, particularly in literacy and numeracy, and to close the gaps in achievement.

Northern Ireland Office's Longitudinal Research Study on Young Men

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for an update on his Department's and the Northern Ireland Office's longitudinal research study on young men.
(AQW 6607/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The five year longitudinal study into adolescent male post primary school life experiences (2006-2011) is co-funded by the Department of Education and the Department of Justice (previously the NIO) and carried out by the Centre for Young Men's Studies at the University of Ulster.

Over the five year period of the study, over 370 young men across nine schools as well as a number of teachers and principals have participated.

The study is now near completion and the Steering Group overseeing the study plans to publish a report on the study in the near future.

Child Internet Safety

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to outline the strategic development within his Department on child internet safety.
(AQW 6614/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Schools are required to have in place policies on the safe and effective use of the Internet. The Department of Education issued advice to schools on drawing up policies for the safe and acceptable use of the Internet and digital technologies via DE Circular 2007/1. Additional advice was provided in September 2011 in DE Circular 2011/22, in particular the circular addressed C2k filtering of internet access, the accessing and reporting of inappropriate material, security considerations within a non-C2k system, classroom use of materials and resources from blocked websites and informing parents about blocked websites. Links to guidance produced by key organisations involved in child protection are available on the DE website to assist schools when drawing up and updating their acceptable use policies.

C2k provides all grant-aided schools with access to the Internet as part of its managed Information and Communications Technology (ICT) service. To keep pupils safe when on-line, the service operates a rigorous internet filtering policy which automatically sifts websites into a number of categories. On the basis of these categories, C2k's filtering policy permits or denies access, with the list of allowed and disallowed websites updated daily C2k limits internet access to pupils, teachers and school employees only. This access is age appropriate to the pupils and further physical controls such as firewalls and password protection are employed on every C2k computer.

ICT plays a central role in the revised curriculum and pupils need to be suitably educated so that they have the confidence and skills to navigate the Internet safely. Using ICT is a cross-curricular skill, compulsory at all key stages of the curriculum. As part of Using ICT, pupils learn how to keep safe and display acceptable online behaviour. C2k is currently collating resources and tools to promote Internet safety and these will be made available to schools in support of Safer Internet Day 2012.

Preschool Places

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister of Education for an update on plans to provide one year of funded pre-school places for all children.
(AQW 6639/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Draft Programme for Government includes a commitment to ensure that at least one year of preschool education is available to every family that wants it. This is consistent with the aim of the Department's Pre-School Education Expansion Programme (PSEEP) which was launched in 1998.

The pre-school year is a non-compulsory phase of education. In the 2011/2012 school year there are over 23,000 children in funded pre-school education provision. However, it is not always possible to make a place available in the setting expressed by a parent as the first preference.

The review of the pre-school admissions arrangements, which I announced on 17 January, will be an important factor in considering what changes are needed. The establishment of the Education and Skills Authority will also offer a changed context in which to take forward some of the actions identified in the Report.

DE is continuing to work with the Education and Library Boards to ensure an adequate number of funded pre-school places are available in future years. If necessary, additional capacity in the pre-school education sector may be achieved through several options such as the creation of new/additional statutory nursery units or by the allocation of funded places in the voluntary and private settings participating in the PSEEP.

Sure Start

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Education to detail the services currently provided by Sure Start in the South Belfast constituency.
(AQW 6641/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Sure Start services are provided to 6 wards within the South Belfast constituency. Inner City South Belfast Sure Start currently operates in the ward areas of Blackstaff, Shaftesbury, Botanic and Ballynafeigh, and within the Taughmonagh

and Benmore Estates, which sit within the Upper Malone ward. In addition services are provided for Chinese families with a pre school child living in the Greater Belfast area. The Woodstock ward is served by the East Belfast Sure Start project. The services offered by Sure Start are aimed at families with children aged birth -4 years and include:

- family Support through home visits and befriending services;
- early learning and care experiences for children;
- programmes for parents to provide support for parenting, and educational opportunities;
- health promotion including support for prospective parents, breast feeding, nutrition, dental health, addiction and wider health issues including mental health; and
- speech, language and communication support.

Youth Service: South Belfast

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Education to detail the activities currently provided by the Youth Service in the South Belfast constituency.
(AQW 6642/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Youth provision in the South Belfast Constituency is a matter for the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB). The BELB has advised that youth activities are currently provided via 49 registered youth providers in the area.

The youth work curriculum is distinctly educational and involves constructive interventions with young people mainly in non-formal settings. All activities offered within youth service are aligned to the programme areas as defined within the document 'Youth Work: A Model for Effective Practice'. While faith based and 'uniformed' youth groups may base their activities around different programme models, the 'personal and social development' of young people as a central theme is common to all.

A detailed list of activities offered by each youth provider is not held by the Department of Education nor the BELB and could only be gathered at disproportionate cost. However a sample of the activities and programmes that have been evidenced during youth officer monitoring visits and from reports submitted by youth groups is included below:

Youth Services activities provided in the South Belfast constituency area

Enjoying, Learning and Achieving

- Residential opportunities
- International visits/exchanges
- Educational visits
- Bullying awareness programmes
- General youth club activities such as pool, snooker, table tennis, arts and crafts, competitions, quizzes

Economic and Environmental Well Being

- Entrepreneurship
- OCN youth leadership
- Homework clubs
- Youth work in schools, delivering COPE and XL programmes
- Accredited and non-accredited certification
- Environmental projects including community clean ups, gardening projects, road safety campaigns, murals, photographic projects, recycling initiatives

Being Healthy and Living in Safety

- Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme
- Community safety programmes
- Drug awareness projects
- Healthy lifestyle projects
- Sex education programmes
- Healthy eating workshops
- Young men's work
- Young women's work
- Sporting activities including football, hockey, dance, indoor and outdoor games
- Outdoor educational activities including hill walking, canoeing, abseiling, orienteering, bouldering, map reading

Participation and Making a Positive Contribution

- Local youth forums

- Involvement of young people in planning their own programmes
- Millennium Volunteer Award Scheme
- Local advisory committees for youth centres
- South Belfast Steering Group
- Late night 'drop in' Friday evenings
- Detached and outreach youth work
- Inter-agency/community partnership work
- Inter-generational programmes
- Charity fundraising
- Developing young volunteers
- Young people identified within 'Section 75'
- Cross community programmes

Sustainable Schools Policy

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education when there will be a requirement for the minimum number of enrolled pupils in a school to be higher than the minimum threshold, as outlined in the Sustainable Schools Policy.
(AQW 6646/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Sustainable Schools Policy sets out six criteria and associated indicators for consideration of a school's educational viability. Stable Enrolment Trends is only one of the six criteria against which a school is assessed.

The policy specifies minimum enrolment thresholds and is explicit that these are not optimum. It will be a matter for school managing authorities to determine in each case, the size a school needs to be to ensure a high quality education can be delivered in an effective and efficient manner within the available budget delegated to the school and taking account of the overall need for places within the area.

Area-based Planning

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education how many meetings each Education and Library Board has held with the integrated and Irish-medium sectors in preparation for area-based planning; and how many such meetings he expects the Boards to hold.
(AQW 6648/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Terms of Reference for area planning, which issued on 15 December 2011, recognise that the Trustees and Boards of Governors of grant-maintained integrated schools, voluntary grammar schools and Irish medium schools, together with the relevant sectoral bodies, all have an important contribution to make to the area planning process. It is a requirement of the process for the Education and Library Boards (ELBs), working with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) to engage with, and seek input from, these sectors.

I am aware that many of the ELBs have met the various sectors on a range of issues including area planning and that further meetings are planned. There is no set procedure to determine how often the ELBS should meet or how many meetings are required. I would, however, anticipate that the process will be refined as area planning develops.

Area-based Planning

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education the detail the geographical areas involved in the area-based planning process.
(AQW 6649/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have commissioned the Education & Library Boards, working with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and engaging with other school sectors to develop collective strategic plans based on each Board area.

The initial plans will cover provision within each Board area and take account of cross boundary issues. This is as specified in the Terms of Reference for area planning, issued to the Boards and CCMS on 15 December 2011.

The planning process may involve developing constituent local plans which will be combined to produce the overall Board level area plan.

Integrated Schools

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education how many pupils currently attending integrated schools have been expelled from their previous schools.
(AQW 6677/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not hold the requested information.

Statistics on pupil suspensions and expulsions are collected annually from each of the Education and Library Boards and published on the Department's website at http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/21-pupils-parents-pg/pupils_parents-suspensions_and_expulsions_pg.htm.

This data does not include information on the education placement of expelled pupils which is a matter for the pupil's parent(s) and the relevant Education and Library Board.

Corran Integrated Primary School, Larne

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education to outline the status of Corran Integrated Primary School's application for accommodation for permanent school buildings at its current site.
(AQW 6679/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In my statement to the Assembly on 26 September 2011 I announced that I had commissioned the five Education and Library Boards, working in close conjunction with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and other sectors, to co-ordinate a strategic area planning process for the education provision required in each Board area. This process will result in an effectively planned, sustainable and affordable pattern of schools and will ensure that we have the right type and size of schools, in the right places, to meet the needs of pupils.

Potential projects will be critically assessed as part of the area planning process to determine how they will contribute to the overall infrastructure needed. No school building project will be looked at in isolation; all will be considered in the context of the wider area, and future capital investment will be targeted at supporting area plans.

Until this work is completed (I have asked for plans for primary provision by June 2012), I will not be in a position to comment on any individual school.

St Comgall's College, Larne: Reimbursement of Funding

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education (i) what steps his Department is taking to reclaim funding allocated to the Trustees of St Comgall's College, Larne, for the construction and maintenance of school buildings at the Bankhead site; and (ii) how the amount of funding to be reclaimed is calculated.
(AQW 6680/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Where there is disposal of an education asset which has been funded, wholly or in part, by Government grants proportionate re-imbursement is sought.

When it is clarified that St Comgall's College is no longer required for other educational purposes the department's disposal procedures will be implemented.

However when an existing school building is to be closed and replaced, as in the case with St Comgall's College, the proceeds from the sale of the old premises go towards the cost of capital investment to accommodate the additional pupils in the replacement premises (St Killian's in this case). The proceeds which would be due to the Department and the Trustees are preserved in an equity share in the school.

In the event that St Killian's becomes surplus in the future, grant recovery calculations will take account of all the investments made by the Department.

Foyle College and Ebrington Primary School

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Education for an update on the proposal to move Foyle College and Ebrington Primary School to a new site in Clooney.
(AQW 6681/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In my statement to the Assembly on 26 September 2011 I announced that I had commissioned the five Education and Library Boards, working in close conjunction with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and other sectors, to co-ordinate a strategic area planning process for the education provision required in each Board area. This process will result in an effectively planned, sustainable and affordable pattern of schools and will ensure that we have the right type and size of schools, in the right places, to meet the needs of pupils.

Potential projects will be critically assessed as part of the area planning process to determine how they will contribute to the overall infrastructure needed. No school building project will be looked at in isolation; all will be considered in the context of the wider area, and future capital investment will be targeted at supporting area plans.

In common with all other proposed capital projects, the continued progression of the Foyle and Ebrington project will be subject to the area planning process for the Derry city area.

Until this work is complete I will not be in a position to comment on individual schools or areas.

Preschool Places

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of applications received for a pre-school place in the 2011/12 academic year at (a) Dundela Infants School, Belfast; (b) Loughview Integrated Nursery, Belfast; (c) St Colmcille's Pre-School, Belfast; (d) Ravenscroft Nursery, Belfast; (e) Orangefield Nursery, Belfast; (f) Sandbrook Nursery, Belfast; (g) Little Ducks Playroom, Belfast; (h) Dundonald Nursery, Dundonald; (i) McArthur Nursery, Belfast; (j) Knocknagoney Nursery, Belfast (k) Glendhu Nursery, Belfast; (l) Avoniel Nursery, Belfast; (m) Greenwood Nursery, Belfast; (n) St Matthews Nursery, Belfast; (o) Braniel

Nursery, Belfast; (p) Brooklands Nursery, Dundonald; (q) Castlereagh Nursery, Belfast; (r) Belmont Pre-School, Belfast; (s) Kings Road Nursery, Belfast; and (t) Ballybeen Women's Centre Pre-School, Dundonald.
(AQW 6718/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of applications to each named nursery school/unit/playgroup in the 2011/12 academic year was as follows:-

	Nursery School/Unit/Playgroup	Applications
a	Dundela Nursery Unit	125
b	Loughview Nursery Unit	47
c	St Colmcille's Playgroup	88
d	Ravenscroft Nursery School	86
e	Orangefield Nursery Unit	100
f	Sandbrook Nursery School	63
g	Carew II (Little Ducks) Family & Training	18
h	Dundonald Nursery Unit	35
i	McArthur Nursery School	62
j	Knocknagoney Nursery Unit	52
k	Glendhu Nursery Unit	48
l	Avoniel Nursery Unit	66
m	Greenwood Nursery Unit	104
n	St Matthew's Nursery Unit	43
o	Braniel Nursery Unit	89
p	Brooklands Nursery Unit	76
q	Castlereagh Nursery School	57
r	Belmont Pre-School Playgroup	90
s	King's Road Nursery School	83
t	Ballybeen Women's Centre Pre-School Playgroup	13

Board of Governor Positions

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education how his Department advertises Board of Governor positions; and whether his Department is considering changes to this process.
(AQW 6720/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department advertises for school governors in the main daily newspapers; through a wide range of business, voluntary and community networks; and via the 'All Aboard' newssheet published by the Central Appointments Unit prior to each reconstitution of school Boards of Governors.

We keep the arrangements for advertising governor positions under review. To encourage more people from all walks of life to put themselves forward for consideration we have recently extended our governor recruitment actions to include advertising in local newspapers in areas where there are schools with vacant governor posts and have been making use of social media networks including Twitter.

Board of Governor Positions

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education how he intends to encourage more people to apply for Board of Governor positions.
(AQW 6721/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Ensuring effective governance is a key element of my wider work to improve educational outcomes and it is my aim to raise awareness and interest in the important work that school governors undertake.

We have already made changes in how we advertise governor vacancies, including for example by broadening the range of publications and networks through which we publicise governor vacancies and this is already helping to encourage more

people to come forward. We will also be working to identify new and additional ways of promoting the work of school governors, particularly as we prepare for the next major reconstitution exercise in 2013, with the aim of encouraging more people to come forward from all sections of the community.

DE: Legislation

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education what legislation his Department plans to bring to the Assembly in the 2011-15 period.
(AQW 6722/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department plans to bring the following primary legislation to the Assembly:

An Education Bill, which will provide for the establishment and functions of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA); the dissolution of a number of existing statutory education bodies; and the transfer of their assets, liabilities, functions and staff to the ESA.

A General Teaching Council for NI Bill, which will repeal the existing General Teaching Council for NI provisions in the Education (NI) Order 1998 (as amended) and replace them in order to provide for: the extension of the existing remit of the Council to cover further education lecturers; additional disciplinary functions of the Council; and the establishment of the Council as a body wholly independent from Government.

A Special Educational Needs and Inclusion Bill, which will enable the Department of Education to implement the revised policy resultant from the Special Educational Needs and Inclusion review.

My Department also intends to introduce legislation to put in place arrangements for the regulation of qualifications.

Irish-medium Sector: Shared Education Projects

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education how he intends to ensure that the Irish-medium sector benefits from shared education projects.
(AQW 6724/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The draft Programme for Government includes a commitment to ensure that all children have the opportunity to participate in shared education programmes by 2015 and this includes those within the Irish-Medium sector. It is recognised that given the distinctive characteristics of immersion education this will be challenging. However, I am aware that Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta has engaged in a shared education project funded by the International Fund for Ireland under its Sharing in Education Programme, which will provide valuable learning as to the challenges and potential solutions for this sector.

I intend to establish a Ministerial Advisory Group on shared education which will be tasked with making recommendations on how sharing within education can contribute to the Department's vision for education. This work is expected to encompass all sectors, including the Irish-Medium sector.

Youth Workers

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of youth workers employed in (a) North; (b) South; (c) East; and (d) West Belfast, including in what capacity they are employed; and (ii) whether the Belfast Education and Library Board plans to re-deploy youth workers from St Agnes and St Michael's Youth Club in West Belfast.
(AQW 6726/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Youth provision in the Belfast area is a matter for the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB).

(i) The BELB has provided the following information about the number of youth workers employed in (a) North; (b) South; (c) East; and (d) West Belfast, including in what capacity they are employed:

Area	Part-time	Full-time	Outreach (fixed term)
North Belfast*	91	13	5 North 4 Shankill**
South Belfast	59	6	3
East Belfast	24	7.5	2
West Belfast	93	10.5	3

* The Shankill is included within the North Belfast Divisional Area.

** Four of these posts are on a half time basis.

(ii) The BELB has advised that there are currently no plans to re-deploy any of the current youth workers from St Agnes' or St Michael's Youth Clubs in West Belfast

Area-based Planning

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education (i) which organisations will be involved in the area-based planning process; and (ii) to provide details of the proposed public consultation, including the timetable.
(AQW 6734/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

(i) Prior to the establishment of the Education & Skills Authority, the area planning process will be taken forward by the Education & Library Boards working with CCMS and engaging extensively with other school sectors.

The Terms of Reference, issued on 15 December, define other school sectors as the trustees and Boards of Governors of grant-maintained integrated schools, voluntary grammar schools and other voluntary maintained schools, including Irish-medium schools and the relevant sectoral bodies.

(ii) Given the wide scope and complexity of the task, the timescales specified in the Terms of Reference for completion of the initial plans for the Post-primary and Primary phases, end-March and end-June 2012 respectively, are necessarily indicative and will be subject to discussion with the Education and Library Boards. Public consultation will take place following the Department's consideration of the initial draft area plans to ensure compliance with the Departmental policy framework. The Department will consider and, if satisfied, approve the area plans after the consultation has been completed and the responses considered. Full detail of the consultation process will be made available at that time.

Teachers: Redundancy

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education whether there will be an upper limit on the number of teacher redundancies allowed in an Education and Library Board area, and if so, what is the proposed limit for each Board.
(AQW 6735/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of teacher redundancies in 2012 will be determined by Boards of Governors in light of pressures on school budgets. It will not be dictated by the number of teachers who wish to leave the profession.

Redundancies are a matter for each individual school/employer and the reasons for teacher redundancies, in addition to budgetary constraint, may include school closures/amalgamations, falling enrolments or the curriculum needs of the school. The final decision for schools on how to live within their budget rests with the respective Principal and Board of Governors under the arrangements for Local Management of Schools. It is not possible to anticipate the individual decisions made across 1,200 schools.

I have made funding available to allow schools and employing authorities to manage teacher redundancies at August 2012. The funding will allow employers to offer enhanced compensation and thus encourage volunteers to transfer into redundant posts, keeping compulsory redundancies to a minimum. However, there will be a finite number of redundant posts: there is no open-ended voluntary severance scheme for all teachers who wish to leave the profession.

Funding will only be available for teacher redundancies at August 2012 where employers provide evidence of cost reductions and can demonstrate that there has been a corresponding reduction in full-time equivalent (FTE) staff numbers.

Teachers: Redundancy

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education whether a lower age limit will be applied to teachers who would wish to take redundancy.
(AQW 6736/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Employees, irrespective of age, with more than two years' continuous service are entitled to a redundancy payment from their employer, based on their age and length of service.

Schools: Closures

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Education (i) to provide an estimate of the number of school closures expected; and (ii) which schools are being considered for closure, broken down by Education and Library Board area.
(AQW 6737/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Management of education provision in the schools estate is in the first instance the responsibility of the relevant School Managing Authorities. Should any authority wish to close an individual school they are required to publish a statutory Development Proposal (DP) for the affected school.

An integral element of the DP process is consultation – both prior to publication, when the managing authority and Education and Library Board must consult with those considered to be directly affected by the proposal, and post-publication, when there will be a 2-month period during which anyone who wishes to do so may make their views known to the Department of Education. All comments received are taken into consideration as part of the decision making process before I make a final decision.

Recently I have approved Development Proposals for the closure of two schools with effect from 31 August 2012. The schools involved are:-

Board Area	School
SELB	Keady Primary School
SELB	Aghavilly Primary School

In addition Development Proposals have been approved for the amalgamation of four schools to form two new schools with effect from 31 August 2012. These schools are:

Board Area	School
WELB	St Mary's Boys' P.S. Strabane
	St Mary's Girls' P.S. Strabane
WELB	Elmbrook Special School Enniskillen
	Erne Special School Enniskillen

Currently my Department is also considering a further three Development Proposals for the closure of schools with effect from 31 August 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter. Details of the schools being considered for closure are provided below:-

Board Area	School	Date of Publication of DP
SEELB	Ballykeigle P.S. Comber	13 December 2011
	Dunmurry High School	13 December 2011
	Redburn P.S. Holywood	13 December 2011

Redburn Primary School, Holywood

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education when a final decision will be taken on the future of Redburn Primary School, Holywood.
(AQW 6758/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Development Proposal for the closure of Redburn Primary School was published on 20 December 2011 and is now in the statutory 2 month consultation period which ends on 20 February 2012. Following this, I will make a decision within the context of stated priorities and policies, taking account of all pertinent information and comments received.

My Department will endeavour to complete the process and notify the proposer of the decision within 4 – 6 weeks of the close of the statutory consultation period.

Donaghadee High School Site

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education what plans his Department has for the old Donaghadee High School site.
(AQW 6759/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The South Eastern Education and Library Board has advised that the former Donaghadee High School was adapted to accommodate Killard House School which relocated from their previous site in Newtownards. The relocation took effect from 1 September 2009.

Education and Skills Authority: Relocation of Staff

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education (i) what plans are in place for the relocation of staff in the event of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) being established; and (ii) to detail why ESA-affected staff in Rathgael House, Bangor, have been advised of probable relocation, whereas such staff in Londonderry have not been advised.
(AQW 6787/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There are no plans in place for the relocation of staff. The functions of my Department that will transfer to the ESA are currently based in Bangor and Derry. Staff in the relevant teams have been advised that, following the establishment of the ESA, the functions will be based in their current locations initially, and that future locations will be determined in a location strategy for the entire organisation. The location strategy will be developed in the coming months.

Education and Skills Authority: Staff Gender Breakdown

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education (i) what is the gender breakdown of staff who may be relocated to facilitate the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority; (ii) what consideration will be given to any adverse impact on the established work-life balance of affected staff, particularly woman; and (iii) whether an Equality Impact Assessment will be conducted before the implementation of a relocation programme.
(AQW 6788/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: No decisions have been made of the future location of the functions of my Department that will transfer to the Education and Skills Authority (ESA). Of the staff currently delivering those functions, 62 are male and 94 are female. This is similar to the gender profile of the Department as a whole. The development of a location strategy for the ESA will include consideration of equality impacts. Any member of staff in a transferring function who considers that his or her work life balance may be adversely affected by the location of the function may choose the option of a temporary transfer to the ESA. An officer choosing temporary transfer would, for a period of up to three years, be eligible for redeployment to suitable posts within the civil service.

Special Educational Needs: Statementing Process

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Education to detail the total number of children in the Southern Education and Library Board area who have gone through the statementing process and are currently waiting beyond the agreed timescales for (i) their final statement; and (ii) the allocation of (a) primary; and (b) post-primary school places.
(AQW 6870/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of children in the Southern Education and Library Board who have gone through the statementing process and are currently awaiting their final statement is 12.

No children are currently awaiting the allocation of either a primary or post-primary school place.

Department for Employment and Learning

Queen's University Belfast: Institute of Professional and Legal Studies

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students are currently taking (i) the Bar course; and (ii) the solicitor's course at the Institute of Professional and Legal Studies at Queen's University, Belfast; and what the limit is on the number of students that can take each course.
(AQW 6231/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): Queen's University, Belfast has confirmed that 30 students are currently taking the Bar course and 113 students are currently taking the solicitor's course at its Institute of Professional and Legal Studies. It has also confirmed that there are 30 Barrister places and 120 Solicitor places available at the Institute.

The University has also advised that, in addition to the above intake, the following persons may apply for admission as "recommended students" of the Institute:

Any person who has either:

(a) Been admitted as a student of the Honorable Society of the Inn of Court of Northern Ireland and whom the Inn recommends. Such students shall be admitted only to the course for intending barristers.

(b) Registered as a student of the Law Society of Northern Ireland and whom the Society recommends. Such students shall be admitted only to the course for intending solicitors.

Stranmillis University College and Queen's University Belfast: Proposed Merger

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Employment and Learning when he expects to announce a final decision on the proposed merger of Stranmillis University College, Belfast and Queen's University, Belfast.
(AQW 6331/11-15)

Dr Farry: I set out my thinking on the proposed merger in a statement to the Assembly on 28 November 2011. I announced a two-stage study of the teacher training infrastructure in Northern Ireland to be completed by the autumn of this year. I support the merger and will take it forward if there is sufficient political support for it. This could be in parallel with the study or ahead of it if appropriate.

Hospitality: Spend

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what has been the total spend on hospitality by his Department in each of the last five years.
(AQW 6357/11-15)

Dr Farry: The total spend on hospitality in the Department in each of the last five years was as follows:

2006-07	£30,193
2007-08	£35,455
2008-09	£47,348
2009-10	£64,936

2010-11	£47,640

It should be noted that expenditure in 2009-10 includes £10,382 that arose as a result of the resolution of disputed invoices for costs originating in 2007-08 (£3,122) and 2008-09 (£7,260).

DEL: Transfer of Functions to Local Government

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, for each of the last five years, to detail the functions that (i) have been transferred; and (ii) are planned to be transferred from his Department to local councils, and of these, to detail (a) the reason behind the transfer of each function; (b) whether additional funding was offered to local councils to assist them in carrying out the functions; and (c) the cost, to his Department, of the final year when each of the functions were the responsibility of his Department; and (iii) may be transferred from his Department to local councils at a future date,
(AQW 6398/11-15)

Dr Farry: In the last five years no functions have been transferred from my Department to local councils. I can also confirm that no such transfers are planned or may occur at a future date.

Veterinary Medicine: Degree Courses

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, given the growth in our agri-foods industry, why local universities do not offer degree courses in veterinary medicine; and what financial assistance is available to local students, who wish to study veterinary medicine but are forced to move to Great Britain, and incur excessive tuition fees to complete their degree.
(AQW 6459/11-15)

Dr Farry: Higher Education Institutions are responsible for their own policies and procedures, including course provision. Queen's University and University of Ulster have, however, stated that the main reason for not offering undergraduate courses in this area is due to the substantial costs involved in establishing such a programme.

Trends within the veterinary profession are surveyed regularly by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS). The most recent survey does not indicate any impending shortfall in the number of veterinary surgeons, nor has the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development identified any such difficulties within Northern Ireland. Furthermore, research undertaken by my Department in 2009, on forecasting future skills needs in Northern Ireland, shows that the supply of veterinary science graduates is projected to meet the indicative graduate requirement up to 2020.

My Department will continue to provide financial support for eligible students from Northern Ireland who commence all undergraduate degree courses, including veterinary science, in Great Britain in academic year 2012/13. Eligible students can apply for a non means-tested tuition fee loan of up to £9,000 for each year of the course. In addition, students may apply for a maximum grant of up to £3,475 and a maximum loan of up to £6,780 for living costs if they live in London, or £4,840 for those living elsewhere.

DEL: Civil Servants from the Foyle Constituency who Work in Greater Belfast

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the total number of civil servants in his Department who live in the Foyle constituency and travel to work in the Greater Belfast area; and the total cost to his Department of subsidising the travel.
(AQW 6515/11-15)

Dr Farry: There are currently 3 staff employed in the Department for Employment and Learning who live in the Foyle constituency and travel to work in the Greater Belfast area whose travel is subsidised by the Department. The total cost of Excess Fares Allowance paid to these staff during the period 1 January 2011 to 31 December 2011 was £8020.60.

St Mary's University College: Board of Governors

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 4887/11-15, of the 15 members of St Mary's University College's Board of Governors, who were listed as non-clergy by occupation, whether any of these Board members were lay clergy, or had any other occupational association to the Catholic Church, either salaried or unsalaried, during their tenure, including those who have retired from their professions.
(AQW 6577/11-15)

Dr Farry: St Mary's University College has advised me that, having carried out an examination of the Board of Governors' register of interests, as far as it can ascertain, none of the 15 members referred to in my response to AQW 4887/11-15 have any occupational association etc. with the Catholic Church.

Study USA Scheme

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Employment and Learning when the 'Study USA Scheme' will be open for applications.
(AQW 6595/11-15)

Dr Farry: Applications for Study USA opened on Friday 13 January 2012. All higher and further education institutions in Northern Ireland and those students who have expressed an interest in participating in the programme have been informed. Interviews have been scheduled for February 2012.

Pre-vocational Schemes

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how he intends to provide financial support to young people on pre-vocational schemes, such as the Give and Take Scheme, who are currently not entitled to a non-means tested training allowance, unlike their peers on mainstream Training for Success programmes.
(AQW 6852/11-15)

Dr Farry: Legislative restrictions prevent my Department from providing a non-means tested Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) to a participant on a pre-vocational programme apart from those funded under provisions in the Employment and Training Act (Northern Ireland) 1950, for example, the Training for Success programme which includes Programme-Led Apprenticeships.

The Include Youth organisation, which administers the Give and Take Scheme, successfully applied for funding under the Northern Ireland European Social Fund Programme for 2007 to 2013. Participants on this scheme are not paid training allowances as such payments are not eligible under the conditions of support from the Fund.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Golf: Irish Open

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in relation to the 2012 Irish Open Golf Championship, what financial assurances have been made in terms of (i) firm financial commitments; and (ii) under-writing, should other sources of financial backing, such as commercial sponsorship, fail to emerge.
(AQW 6124/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment):

(i) The approximate cost of running the Irish Open Golf Championship is £4million. The exact DETI/NITB contribution has not been finalised but is not expected to exceed £2million. However associated costs of marketing and promotion of the event may amount to a further £0.5million.

(ii) No assurance has been given to under-write the event

Go For It Programme

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what changes have been made to the Go For It Programme since October 2011; (ii) how many InvestNI staff currently work for the Go For It Programme; and how the figure compares to October 2010; and (iii) to detail the number of (a) client advisory sessions; (b) client training sessions; and (c) business plans completed in October 2011; and how the figures compare to October 2010.
(AQW 6125/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI is not currently delivering the Go For It programme (i.e. a business start programme under the 'Go For It' branding).

Petroleum Licences

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail whether her Department has any statutory duties to consult with local councils in advance of issuing petroleum licences.
(AQW 6142/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Although my Department has no statutory obligation to do so, notification is provided to a number of organisations including the District Councils, informing them of the intention to grant a petroleum licence and inviting them to make representations to the Department.

Insulation Cashback Schemes

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what provisions his Department would be willing to put in place to ensure that people, who wish to avail of insulation cash back schemes with local electricity providers, are not required to use specific installers, given the need to provide competition and value for money for customers availing of these schemes and also the need to encourage local businesses.
(AQW 6155/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department has no role in setting the criteria for the approval of insulation installers and has no plans to put in place provisions to determine the installers which local energy companies should use.

Payday Lenders

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what consideration he has given to improving the regulation of pay day lenders.
(AQW 6157/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Payday lenders are required to be licensed under the Consumer Credit Act (CCA) 1974 and the Office of Fair Trading is responsible for issuing such licences. In addition to complying with the CCA, if a payday lender behaves in a manner that is unfair, misleading or aggressive, it may also give rise to an offence under The Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008.

I consider the current Controls and Regulatory Framework that apply to payday lenders to be sufficient to deal with any reported legal non-compliance by these lenders in Northern Ireland.

However, given recent concerns raised, I have asked my officials to keep a close watching brief on any developments on this issue.

Tourism: Visitor Numbers

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list the top twenty destinations in terms of visitor numbers in each of the last five years.
(AQW 6194/11-15)

Mrs Foster: This information is sourced from the Northern Ireland Visitor Attraction Survey. The report for 2011 will not be available until March 2012 so data has been provided for the years 2006 to 2010. It is important to note that the Visitor Attraction Survey is a voluntary survey and all data presented in the report is based solely on the visitor numbers provided by attractions choosing to take part in the survey. Visitor numbers are provided by the proprietor of the attraction and are taken in good faith.

Top twenty destinations in terms of visitor numbers 2006 - 2007

	2006	2007
1	Crawfordsburn Country Park	Crawfordsburn Country Park
2	Redburn Country Park	Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre
3	Botanic Gardens	Botanic Gardens
4	Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre	Roe Valley Country Park
5	Lagan Valley Regional Park	Belfast Zoological Gardens
6	Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park	W5
7	Roe Valley Country Park	Delamont Country Park
8	Oxford Island National Nature Reserve	Scrabo Country Park
9	Colin Glen Forest Park	Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge
10	Belfast Zoological Gardens	Oxford Island National Nature Reserve
11	W5	Historic Walls in Londonderry
12	Scrabo Country Park	Belfast Lough RSPB Reserve
13	Historic Walls in Londonderry	Carnfunnock Country Park
14	Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge	Belleek Pottery
15	Ulster Museum	Ulster Folk & Transport Museum
16	Carnfunnock Country Park	Castle Archdale Country Park
17	Ulster Folk & Transport Museum	Ulster American Folk Park
18	Castle Archdale Country Park	Tollymore Forest Park
19	Ulster American Folk Park	Saint Patrick Centre
20	Tollymore Forest Park	Castlewellan Forest Park

Top twenty destinations in terms of visitor numbers 2008 - 2009

	2008	2009
1	Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre	Crawfordsburn Country Park
2	Crawfordsburn Country Park	Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre
3	Botanic Gardens	Botanic Gardens
4	Lagan Valley Regional Park	Lagan Valley Regional Park
5	Oxford Island National Nature Reserve	Oxford Island National Nature Reserve
6	Roe Valley Country Park	Belfast Zoological Gardens
7	W5	Titanic's Dock & Pump-House
8	Island Arts Centre	W5
9	Belfast Zoological Gardens	Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge
10	Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge	Scrabo Country Park
11	Colin Glen Forest Park	Historic Walls in Londonderry
12	Scrabo Country Park	Carnfunnock Country Park
13	Historic Walls in Londonderry	Sir Thomas And Lady Dixon Park
14	Ulster Folk & Transport Museum	Portstewart Strand
15	Delamont Country Park	Ulster Folk & Transport Museum
16	Carnfunnock Country Park	Tollymore Forest Park
17	Castle Archdale Country Park	Ulster American Folk Park
18	Portstewart Strand	Belleek Pottery
19	Ulster American Folk Park	Ulster Museum
20	Belleek Pottery	Delamont Country Park

Top twenty destinations in terms of visitor numbers 2010

	2010
1	Crawfordsburn Country Park
2	Botanic Gardens
3	Lagan Valley Regional Park
4	Dundonald Ice Bowl
5	Ulster Museum
6	Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre
7	Roe Valley Country Park
8	Historic Walls in Londonderry
9	Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge
10	W5
11	Belfast Zoological Gardens
12	Scrabo Country Park
13	Carnfunnock Country Park
14	Delamont Country Park

	2010
15	Castle Archdale Country Park
16	Ulster Folk & Transport Museum
17	Belleek Pottery
18	Mount Stewart House and Gardens
19	Ulster American Folk Park
20	Dungannon Park & Lake

Arms Trade

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether InvestNI has provided any financial support to companies that are engaged in the arms trade, in each of the last five years; and, if so, to provide further details.
(AQW 6196/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The table below provides details of the amounts of financial assistance offered by Invest NI for such projects in the last five years:

Amount	Date of Offer	Type of Support
£356,000	March 2005*	Selective Financial Assistance
£3,483,200	December 2009	Research and Development
£2,996,417	January 2012	Research and Development

* Whilst the date of the original offer is outside the five year period in question, drawdown for this project did not commence until March 2006.

Quangos

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many quangos currently operate under the remit of her Department.
(AQW 6221/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department currently sponsors four Executive NDPBs.

Ballykelly: Former Army Barracks Site

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has had any correspondence with with her Executive colleagues in relation to the acquisition of the former army barracks site at Ballykelly, and if so, to detail this correspondence; and what steps she intends to take to produce a masterplan for the development of this site.
(AQW 6241/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have not had any correspondence with Executive Ministers on this issue.

Please also note that OFMDFM assumed responsibility for the Shackelton Barracks site at Ballykelly in October 2011.

Project Kelvin

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the outcomes of Project Kelvin in terms of the jobs created and the business attracted.
(AQW 6242/11-15)

Mrs Foster: All investment decisions are based on a number of factors. It is not possible to align a company's decision to invest solely with the benefits provided by Project Kelvin. Furthermore, my Department does not hold details of the uptake by businesses of the services offered by Project Kelvin, as these are commercial transactions between Hibernia Atlantic and their customers.

Northern Ireland's telecoms infrastructure, including the direct transatlantic link provided by Project Kelvin, contributes to the positioning of the region as a location capable of providing solutions to the business needs of both new and existing investors. Other factors also contribute to the Northern Ireland proposition, including our highly capable workforce, our proximity to customers and the support provided by Invest NI.

Invest NI has identified the benefits provided by Project Kelvin and incorporated these into its sales messages. Invest NI also works closely with all local telecoms suppliers to position the benefits with customers. While it is certain that Project Kelvin

has enhanced Northern Ireland's attractiveness to potential investors, it is not possible to directly attribute investment to one infrastructural element and quantify the outcomes in terms of jobs created and business attracted.

Wind Farms

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the number of MW/H of energy generated from each wind farm in each of the last five years; and (ii) the projected energy generation for each wind farm for each of the next four years.
(AQW 6243/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department does not hold existing or forecast generation data for individual wind farms. However, total wind power[1] generation for the period 2006/07 to 2010/11 is provided in the table below:

	Electricity generated from onshore wind (GWh[2])
2010/11	675.4
2009/10	709.8
2008/09	583.9
2007/08	431.7
2006/07	335

Source: NIE

Notes:

1 Onshore wind figure includes electricity generated by wind farms and individual wind turbines.

2 GWh – Gigawatt hour. One gigawatt equals one thousand megawatts

Wind Farms

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps her Department has taken to maximise the potential benefits to communities of having a windfarm nearby.
(AQW 6244/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Last year, my Department established a group on Planning & Renewable Energy with a remit to work together to ensure that renewable energy projects and installations are delivered in time to meet Executive renewable energy targets. It has been set up as a sub-group of the Sustainable Energy Inter Departmental Working Group (SEIDWG) and includes representatives from DETI and DOE.

I am aware that an industry group and a community group are both currently developing community benefit protocols. The sub-group will consider these documents when published and determine if additional government guidance is required.

Hydraulic Fracturing and Water Pollution

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has read the recent report by the United States Environmental Protection Agency on the impact of hydraulic fracturing on water pollution; and if so, for her assessment of the findings of the report.
(AQW 6245/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Officials in my Department have read the report and apprised me of the contents and implications. The report presents the findings of an investigation into reports of groundwater contamination in water wells above the Pavillion gas field, Wyoming. In their press release of 8th December 2011 the EPA makes it clear that the findings are specific to that field and not applicable to hydraulic fracturing operations elsewhere in the USA.

The results indicate that gas production activities have enhanced upward gas migration into domestic wells but that chemicals associated with hydraulic fracturing have contaminated ground water at and below the depth used for domestic water supply.

The investigation supports recent recommendations made by the U.S. Department of Energy Panel on the need for collection of baseline data, greater transparency on chemical composition of hydraulic fracturing fluids, and greater emphasis on well construction and integrity requirements and testing. As stated by the panel, implementation of these recommendations would decrease the likelihood of impact to ground water and increase public confidence in the technology.

All these recommendations will be included in the regulatory controls placed on any future hydraulic fracturing operations in Northern Ireland. In addition, Tamboran Resources have restated their commitment not to use chemical additives in their fracturing fluids.

The Pavillion field hydraulic fracturing has been carried out at very shallow depths in the Wind River Formation, which consists of a lithologically variable sandstone-shale sequence and is also the main source of ground water in the area. Poor gas production

well design and construction, in combination with natural migration pathways through highly permeable sandstone lenses, has resulted in upward vertical gas and fluid migration.

In Fermanagh, by contrast, the Bundoran Shale Formation is a low permeability shale unit which is separated from the shallow Dartry Limestone Formation aquifer and the surface by the thick very low permeability Mullaghmore Sandstone and Benbulben Shale Formations.

Hydraulic Fracturing and Water Pollution

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the link between hydraulic fracturing and water pollution.
(AQW 6246/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The evidence from the US indicates that hydraulic fracturing operations can be carried out without causing any pollution of either surface waters or shallow groundwater aquifers, provided that wells are designed, constructed and operated to the required standards, and that there are sufficiently thick low permeability rock layers between the fractured shale zone and the shallow aquifer rocks.

If, on the other hand, wells are not constructed properly – e.g. near surface aquifers are not completely isolated from the well bore by intermediate steel casing and effective cement programmes - and the local geology contains potential migration pathways, or the surface storage and disposal of produced waters is not adequate, then there will be the potential for hydraulic fracturing to cause water pollution. The key to reducing the risks and preventing pollution is the implementation and effective application of appropriate regulatory controls, such as will be applied to any future hydraulic fracturing operations in Northern Ireland.

Electricity: Switching Suppliers

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many people have switched electricity suppliers in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6255/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department does not hold the information requested. The Utility Regulator has advised that 6,367 customers switched their electricity supplier in 2009. For 2010 and 2011, the Utility Regulator holds only aggregated information covering new connections and switches; this will change later this year when a new switching system is put in place.

Electricity: Switching Suppliers

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the number of domestic customers who have attempted to switch electricity suppliers in the last three years; (ii) the number of domestic customers who have been stopped from changing supplier; (iii) the reasons that domestic customers can be blocked from switching suppliers; and (iv) the number of times each reason was used to block domestic customers from switching during this period.
(AQW 6256/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department does not hold the data requested in parts (i), (ii) and (iv) of the question.

In relation to part (iii), a switch can be cancelled or rejected for a number of reasons. These include: a request by the customer; where the data provided (for example meter number or address) is incorrect; where there are issues of a debt to be resolved; and where another switching process is already in place.

Hydraulic Fracturing and Water Pollution

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department has any plans to investigate the links between hydraulic fracturing and water pollution, apart from awaiting the outcome of the Department of the Environment's Environmental Impact Assessment.
(AQW 6257/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department will continue to review the findings of studies from areas with active shale gas and hydraulic fracturing operations in the USA where incidents of water pollution have been reported, and assess the relevance of these to any future shale gas exploration and production in Northern Ireland. The Geological Survey of Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Environmental Agency also intend to participate in a geochemical survey of well waters in Northern Ireland as part of a wider baseline study of UK groundwater being undertaken by the British Geological Survey.

Hydraulic Fracturing and Water Pollution

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has any plans to meet with the Environment Agency to discuss the link between hydraulic fracturing and water pollution.
(AQW 6258/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Officials in my Department have discussed many aspects of shale gas operations, including the potential risks of water pollution, with their counterparts in the Department of Environment and other Government agencies . These discussions

form part of an ongoing assessment of regulatory controls specific to shale gas exploration and production in Northern Ireland. My officials will be keeping me fully informed about the outcomes of this assessment process.

Industrial Land: Magherafelt District Council Area

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 6024/11-15, how much of the land which is allocated or leased at (i) Station Road; and (ii) Creagh is currently occupied.
(AQW 6300/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The table below provides details on the occupancy of Invest NI's Station Road and Creagh Industrial Estates.

Industrial Estate	Land Allocated/Leased (Acres)	Land Occupied* (Acres)
Station Road	14.9	14.9
Creagh	13.2	5.5**
Total	28.1	20.4

* Occupied is defined as the land leased by a company where their development has been completed **This includes 0.8 acres occupied by a NIE substation and a NI Water pumping station

Tourism: Vistor Numbers

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many people from (i) the Republic of Ireland; (ii) mainland UK; (iii) elsewhere in the EU; (iv) North America; and (v) the rest of the world holidayed in Northern Ireland in 2011; and how this compares to the previous three years.
(AQW 6302/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Visitor estimates for the full period from January – December 2011 are not yet available. January – September 2011 estimates for overseas visitors to NI are available to view on the Department Website: http://www.detini.gov.uk/jan-sept_2011_tourism_estimates.pdf

Visitor estimates for overseas markets for 2011 will be available from April 2012.

Estimates for visitors from the Republic of Ireland are sourced from the Central Statistics Office Ireland. A date has not yet been published for the release of 2011 estimates.

Hotel Occupancy Rates

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what was the hotel occupancy rate during 2011; and how this compares to the previous three years.
(AQW 6303/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Hotel occupancy rates are collected through the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) monthly Hotel Occupancy Survey. The annual report for 2011 will not be available until April 2012. For information, estimates for the first three quarters of the year (January-September) have been provided, for 2008-2011.

Hotel Room and Bed occupancy rates, January-September 2008 - 2011

Year	Hotel Room Occupancy (January-September)	Hotel Bed Occupancy (January-September)
2008	65%	45%
2009	60%	43%
2010	60%	44%
2011	60%	43%

Please note that in 2010 the methodology for producing these estimates changed, so estimates are presented here for information, but 2008 and 2009 estimates are not directly comparable to 2010 onwards.

Tourism: Vistor Numbers

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps her Department has taken to increase the number of visitors to each of the top 10 tourist destinations; and for her assessment of the success of these initiatives.
(AQW 6306/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Northern Ireland's top visitor attractions feature prominently in the promotional campaigns of Tourism Ireland Limited (TIL) overseas and of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) on the Island of Ireland. Both organisations run a range

of promotional and tactical campaigns each year. The products and regions featured are based on what motivates our best prospects, identified through research and align to key priorities such as NI 2012, Titanic, the Giants Causeway Visitor Centre and other Signature Projects.

The latest projections for 2011 indicate that 1.51 million overseas visitors will visit Northern Ireland, representing a +6% increase over 2010. Revenue generated by overseas visitors is expected to be approximately £340 million, a +16% increase over 2010. Latest figures on domestic tourism indicate that during January to September 2011 a total of 1.5million overnight trips were taken within NI by local residents with revenue generated of £121million. Comparable domestic tourism data is not available for 2010 due to a change in survey methodology. Figures for the Republic of Ireland market are not yet available.

NI 2012 represents an unprecedented opportunity to put Northern Ireland on the global stage in a completely new way. The superb programme of new attractions, events and historic anniversaries taking place in 2012 and 2013 will stimulate interest in Northern Ireland and help define what makes it different and why tourists should choose to visit.

TIL's 2012 strategy will see the roll-out of a new three-year global advertising campaign comprising TV, radio, print, cinema and online advertisements featuring locations such as the new Titanic Belfast building, the music scene in Belfast, as well as iconic tourist spots like the Giant's Causeway. The campaign has been developed to be flexible and adaptable and will evolve over its three-year lifespan to capitalise on events such as Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013, golfing opportunities available and promote other key attractions in Northern Ireland. The brand new suite of ads will reach over 200 million consumers in 2012 alone

With the introduction of the nine key tourism areas, NITB will be working closely with local councils and other key partners to ensure key relevant local tourism products are developed and promoted to potential visitors.

Export Decline

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, with businesses having entered their fifth year of export decline, what strategy she has to arrest and reverse this decline.
(AQW 6312/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The most recent available Regional Trade Statistics, published by HMRC, indicate that exports from NI in the first three quarters of 2011 were 10.0% higher than for the same period in 2010.

The draft Economic Strategy sets out how the Executive plans to support the growth of a prosperous local economy through a focus on export-led economic growth.

The strategy aims to increase the number of Northern Ireland firms which are exporting and encourage existing exporters to diversify into new markets. By selling our goods and services outside of Northern Ireland we will be able to rebalance the local economy towards higher value added private sector activity and rebuild the local labour market in the aftermath of the recession. This export based approach has been followed by many successful small open economies internationally.

Export Decline: Republic of Ireland

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given the 19 percent decline in exports to the Republic of Ireland in 2010/11, what steps she has taken to reverse the trend towards an all-Ireland focus within the economy.
(AQW 6313/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The draft Economic Strategy sets out how the Executive plans to support the growth of a prosperous local economy through a focus on export-led economic growth.

The strategy aims to increase the number of Northern Ireland firms which are exporting and encourage existing exporters to diversify into new markets.

The large majority of sales outside Northern Ireland are presently destined for either Great Britain or the Republic of Ireland. The draft Economic Strategy recognises the need to build trade links to the world's emerging economies if we are to deliver the Executive's economic priorities.

To this end, Invest NI has increased its representation in Brazil, Canada, Russia, Saudi Arabia and South Africa to help companies develop export opportunities in those markets. This builds on the existing representation in China, Germany, India, United Arab Emirates and the USA.

Hospitality: Invest NI

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what has been the total spend on hospitality by InvestNI in each of the last five years.
(AQW 6314/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI supports and hosts a number of marketing and promotional events each year that form a very important element of Invest NI's agreed sales strategy. The provision of hospitality at such events forms part of this and provides an essential means of interacting with key global decision makers in order to attract new investment.

The total spend on hospitality over the last five financial years is as follows:

Financial Year	Amount
2011/12 (April to December 2011)	262,465
2010/11	487,026
2009/10	562,318
2008/9	481,759
2007/8	300,130

Hospitality: Spend

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what has been the total spend on hospitality by her Department in each of the last five years.
(AQW 6316/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The amount spent by DETI on hospitality in each of the last 5 years is as follows:

10/11	£24,818
09/10	£19,868
08/09	£18,777
07/08	£17,026
06/07	£22,818

Tourism: Angling

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 5422/11-15, for her assessment of the downturn in the estimated spend by direct Great Britain and overseas visitors who participated in angling during their stay in Northern Ireland from £6.2 millon in 2008 to £3.6 million in 2009.
(AQW 6334/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The downturn in estimated spend by direct Great Britain and overseas visitors who participated in angling during their stay in Northern Ireland, from £6.2 million in 2008 to £3.6 million in 2009, is due to fewer people participating in angling, as well as a reduction in the average spend per trip in 2009 compared with 2008. The number of direct visitors who participated in angling in 2009 was one third less compared with 2008. Those who participated in angling during their stay in 2009 spent on average 11% or £43 less per trip compared with 2008.

The total number of direct GB and overseas visitors who came to Northern Ireland in 2009 (as opposed to those who specifically participated in angling during their stay) fell significantly (-16%) compared with 2008 and spend per trip also declined by approximately 10% during the same period. Large reductions were evident for the number of direct Great Britain and overseas visitors participating in other activities in 2009 compared with 2008, e.g. approximately -20% for both golf and cycling, which negatively impacts on spend.

The figures provided relate only to 'direct' Great Britain and overseas visitors, i.e. those who exited via a Northern Ireland air or sea port and stayed at least one night in Northern Ireland. They exclude Great Britain and overseas visitors who stayed at least one night in Northern Ireland but exited via a port in the Republic of Ireland ('via ROI' visitors). ROI residents are also excluded.

Tourism: Angling

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant AQW 5422/11-15, to specify the changes in methodology which means that the estimated spend by direct GB and overseas visitors who participated in angling during their stay in Northern Ireland, cannot be directly compared to the spend prior to 2010.
(AQW 6335/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Following a review of the Northern Ireland Passenger Survey, the methodology was revised in 2010. Changes were made to the sampling frame, definitions, weighting and grossing, collection and production of survey estimates.

The survey and analysis methodology is outlined on the Department website:

http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-stats-index/tourism-statistics/stats-overseas-visitors/stats-nips-methodology.htm

A document outlining the benefits and implications of the change in methodology in 2010 is available to view on this webpage.

Businesses Operating in Northern Ireland

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether there are any targets for the proportion of businesses operating in Northern Ireland to be locally owned.
(AQW 6344/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The draft Economic Strategy does not contain any targets relating to the proportion of businesses operating in Northern Ireland to be locally owned.

The strategy aims to create wealth and employment through export-led economic growth. This will be delivered by both locally owned businesses and foreign direct investors.

Gas Network: Proposed Expansion

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when she expects the cost of the proposed expansion of the gas network to be repaid.
(AQW 6347/11-15)

Mrs Foster: New gas infrastructure would be funded initially by the company licensed to develop the network, with costs recovered from consumers over a defined licence period in agreement with the Utility Regulator.

These issues are part of ongoing consideration and discussion between the Department and the Utility Regulator.

Community Renewable Energy

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what (i) targets; and (ii) policies are in place to encourage community renewable energy or to involve communities in renewable energy development.
(AQW 6351/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There are no specific targets and policies directed at encouraging renewable energy development at community level. The Strategic Energy Framework includes a target to achieve 40% of electricity consumption from renewable sources by 2020 and a level of 10% renewable heat. The draft Programme for Government 2011 – 2015 includes interim targets of 12% renewable electricity and 2% renewable heat in 2012/13, 15% renewable electricity and 3% renewable heat in 2013/14 and 20% renewable electricity and 4% renewable heat by 2014/15.

The Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation and the proposed Renewable Heat Incentive are the main policy mechanisms for incentivising renewable electricity and heat across a wide range of sectors, including at a community level.

Economic Downturn

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many businesses in the North Down area have closed as a result of the economic downturn.
(AQW 6352/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The latest Business Demography 2010 publication by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) provides details on the number of enterprises that have closed, broken down by district council area. In addition data is available on the number of enterprises which have opened in North Down over the same period, and thus the net change in the number of businesses.

These statistics are published annually and are available to download from the DETI website at http://www.detini.gov.uk/2._business-demography_2010.xls .

The figures for North Down DCA are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Business closures, openings and net change in the number of businesses in North Down DCA

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Business closures	170	155	175	170	220	225	250
Business openings	240	255	200	255	235	145	220
Net change	70	100	25	85	15	-80	-30

While these statistics do not provide any indication of the reasons behind a business closure, the challenging economic climate over the last number of years will undoubtedly have been a factor. There can be many underlying reasons for any individual business ceasing trading, however, the heightened figures between 2008 and 2010 would indicate that the downturn has had a material impact.

Jobs: Mid Ulster

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, for each of the last five years, to detail how many (i) jobs have been lost; and (ii) business have closed or gone into liquidation in the Mid-Ulster area, broken down by district council area. **(AQW 6368/11-15)**

Mrs Foster:

i Although the number of jobs lost is not specifically covered by statistics in Northern Ireland there are a number of information sources that do provide an indication of jobs lost. Firstly, there are two alternating surveys which estimate the number of employee jobs at a point in time. These are the Business Register and Employment Survey and the Census of Employment. Data is available for 2010, 2009, 2007 and 2005 and it indicates the net change in the number of jobs for each District Council Area (DCA). You should note that these surveys underwent some methodological changes during the period outlined below which can compromise some of the comparisons over time.

Table 1: Change in Employee Jobs by DCA

	Net change			Percentage change		
	2005 - 2007	2007 - 2009	2009 - 2010	2005 - 2007	2007 - 2009	2009 - 2010
Cookstown	1,279	-484	672	12.2%	-4.1%	5.9%
Dungannon	2,355	-1,219	-428	12.2%	-5.6%	-2.1%
Magherafelt	738	-1,110	-75	5.3%	-7.5%	-0.5%

The information can also be accessed from the DETI website as follow:

BRES http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-stats-index/stats-surveys/stats-census-of-employment-2.htm

Census http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-stats-index/stats-surveys/stats-census-of-employment.htm

Secondly, a further indicator of the number of jobs lost is provided by the level of confirmed redundancies reported to the Department and this is set out in Table 2 below. Again you will wish to note that employers are only required to report redundancies of 20 or more. The data is available at http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-stats-index/stats-surveys/stats-redundancies.htm

Table 2: Confirmed Redundancies by District Council Area

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Cookstown	2	81	37	33	45
Dungannon	0	96	223	42	2
Magherafelt	67	24	47	23	36

ii. The latest Business Demography 2010 publication by the Office for National Statistics provides details on the number of enterprises that have closed, that have opened and the overall net change – and all at a district council level. The figures for the Mid-Ulster area, by DCA, are presented in Table 3 below while the data underlying this publication is published on the DETI website at http://www.detini.gov.uk/2._business-demography_2010.xls .

Table 3: Business closures, openings and net change in the number of businesses in the Mid-Ulster area

		2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Business Closures	Cookstown	90	85	85	75	100	140	150
	Dungannon	135	125	160	130	125	195	170
	Magherafelt	110	100	110	110	135	165	155
Business Openings	Cookstown	135	155	170	165	135	100	95
	Dungannon	210	230	210	225	200	165	160
	Magherafelt	190	180	195	190	170	105	145
Net change	Cookstown	45	70	85	90	35	-40	-55
	Dungannon	75	105	50	95	75	-30	-10
	Magherafelt	80	80	85	80	35	-60	-10

While these ONS statistics do not provide any indication of the reasons behind a business closure, the challenging economic climate over the last number of years will undoubtedly have been a factor. Data on the number of businesses which have been placed into liquidation is only published at a Northern Ireland level and is available to download from my Department's website at http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-insolvency-index/insolvency-statistics.htm

Renewable Energy Projects

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what support, financial or otherwise, is available to help communities to develop renewable energy projects.
(AQW 6389/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Renewable electricity generation is supported by the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO) and community groups can avail of this. Once accredited as a generator under the NIRO, communities which develop renewable electricity projects can receive Renewables Obligation Certificates which can be sold to electricity suppliers.

My Department has also consulted on the proposed introduction of the Northern Ireland Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI). The RHI has been designed to support the uptake of a range of renewable heat technologies; following the consultation process further analysis is underway to inform the final design of the scheme. The RHI will be available to non-domestic customers, including community groups.

DETI: Transfer of Functions to Local Government

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, for each of the last five years, to detail the functions that (i) have been transferred; and (ii) are planned to be transferred from her Department to local councils, and of these, to detail (a) the reason behind the transfer of each function; (b) whether additional funding was offered to local councils to assist them in carrying out the functions; and (c) the cost, to her Department, of the final year when each of the functions were the responsibility of her Department; and (iii) may be transferred from her Department to local councils at a future date,
(AQW 6399/11-15)

Mrs Foster: No functions have been transferred from my Department to local councils in the last five years and no additional funding has been offered.

In 2008 it was agreed that the following functions would be transferred when the new councils are established on foot of the Review of Local Administration (RPA):-

- Start a Business Programme and Enterprise Shows;
- Youth Entrepreneurship (such as Princes Trust and Shell Livewire);
- Social Entrepreneurship;
- Investing For Women;
- Neighbourhood Renewal funding relating to enterprise initiatives;
- Small scale tourism accommodation development;
- Local tourism marketing;
- Local Tourism product development;
- Visitor servicing;
- Providing business support including business start up advice along with training and delivery of customer care schemes;
- Providing advice to developers on tourism policies and related issues.

I am discussing with the Environment Minister the extent to which this list of functions needs to be revisited in light of developments since 2008 and what the budgetary implications of the final transfer of functions will be.

British Midland International

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the impact on routes from Northern Ireland and local jobs of the take over of British Midlands.
(AQW 6404/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The sale of British Midland International (BMI) to the International Airlines Group (IAG) is due to be completed in the first quarter of 2012. BMI currently operates a service from Belfast City Airport to Heathrow and I welcome the confirmation provided by Willie Walsh, Chief Executive of IAG, in December 2011 that this route is to be retained.

The Belfast-Heathrow link is vital for business and tourism and confirmation that it is to continue is good news for the many people who depend on direct and quick access to and from London.

There are other issues which still require clarification as a result of the sale of BMI and I will be keeping in close touch with IAG.

Invest NI

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the circumstances in which InvestNI has returned £21.6 million to the Department, including for what the money had originally been allocated.
(AQW 6413/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In the current volatile economic climate, particularly across Europe and the USA, declining demand, tighter funding conditions and reduced business confidence means many companies continue to postpone or slow down investment plans to preserve cash. As a provider of matched funding, this has a clear knock-on effect on Invest NI's budget, a high percentage of which is allocated to such projects. As these funds cannot be carried over to future years Invest NI is required to return any amounts to the Executive for reallocation to other departments through Monitoring rounds, along with income realised and efficiency savings made.

Of the £21.6 million that has been returned to DFP £8.9 million related to a slowdown of projects and a further £5 million is for the development of two industrial estates. Contractors' have aggressively tendered for these projects and development costs have been some 60% less than the Central Procurement Directorate forecast, which has saved £5 million of capital budget in this year.

Also included is £1.5 million relating to additional receipts that have been generated for the NI block from loan and shares repayments, land sales and grant clawback. An amount of £0.6 million relates to a technical adjustment for non-cash budgets.

In addition to the above Invest NI has agreed with DFP to make available £5.6 million for two projects which are planned to complete either in this financial year or very early next year.

Invest NI

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what reviews have taken place of the functions and management of InvestNI to ensure that full job creation and growth potential are realised during the recession.
(AQW 6417/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI's performance is the subject of formal quarterly review by my Department and the agency's performance against key indicators, such as its commitment to promote over 25,000 new jobs and increase the value of manufacturing exports by 15% , will be reported on as part of the monitoring of the implementation of the 2012-2015 Programme for Government.

Electricity Generating Infrastructure: Investment

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessement of whether investment in the electricity generating infrastructure is beneficial to economic growth.
(AQW 6423/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Investment in electricity generating infrastructure is necessary to ensure security of electricity supply, and to provide for existing economic activity in Northern Ireland. Such investment will help deliver the lowest possible electricity costs and also provide for economic growth. In particular investment in more renewable generation offers the ability to reduce Northern Ireland's exposure to the fluctuation of wholesale fossil fuel prices over the longer term and offers job creation potential in the associated supply chain as has already been seen with Belfast Harbour and the decision of DONG Energy to assemble wind turbines there.

Low Carbon Communities Challenge

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department is involved in any other projects similar to the Low Carbon Communities Challenge.
(AQW 6429/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Low Carbon Communities Challenge (LCCC) was a two-year programme launched and administered by the Department of Energy and Climate Change to support the development of sustainable energy projects in UK communities. The scheme will complete this year with all funding for the programme already committed to successful projects. My Department was involved with the scheme in respect of Northern Ireland applicants, with one local project receiving funding.

DETI is not currently involved in any other similar projects to that of the LCCC. The Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation and the proposed Renewable Heat Incentive are the main policy mechanisms for incentivising renewable electricity and heat across a wide range of sectors, including at a community level.

Energy Prices

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what actions she has taken to ensure that energy prices are fair and affordable since the Assembly debate on energy prices on 26 September 2011.
(AQW 6431/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Whilst my Department has no statutory role in setting energy prices, my officials continue to maintain close contact with the Utility Regulator regarding energy prices given its important role in electricity and gas regulation. The Department has been advised that the Utility Regulator is keeping regulated electricity and natural gas tariffs under monthly review.

My officials have also continued to engage with new energy suppliers in support of increased competition in the energy supply market in Northern Ireland.

Trade Unions: Funding

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the level of funding her Department allocated to each trade union in the (i) 2000/01; (ii) 2005/06; and (iii) 2010/11 financial years.
(AQW 6497/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Details of the funding provided by DETI to the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance to cover the salary of seconded full-time trade union officials, for each of the years requested, is provided below. Given the small number of staff involved, it would be a breach of Section 40 (2), Personal Information, of the FOI Act to provide exact salary costs, therefore the minimum and maximum points of the relevant salary scales have been provided instead.

Year	Grade of TU Official		Salary Scale
2000/01	* Staff Officer	1/4/00 – 16/7/00	£17358 - £23793
	Deputy Principal	17/7/00 – 5/11/00	£21491 - £33617
	Typist		£9080 - £11902
2005/06	Executive Officer 1		£16851 - £24581
	Typist		£11209 - £13453
2010/11	Administrative Officer		£15038 - £22180

* The seconded Staff Officer was promoted to Deputy Principal in July 2000 and remained on secondment with NIPSA.

DETI: 0845 Numbers

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much revenue has been raised by her Department in each of the last three financial years by the usage of 0845 numbers.
(AQW 6511/11-15)

Mrs Foster: DETI has not raised any revenue from the usage of 0845 numbers in the period stated.

Social Tariffs

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether he intends to introduce a social tariff.
(AQW 6538/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am already on record as stating that the introduction of a social tariff would be extremely complex and unlikely to solve the hardships caused by fuel poverty.

Renewable Energy Group

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions she has had with the Renewable Energy Group aimed at improving the benefits to local communities of having a wind farm nearby.
(AQW 6542/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am aware that the Northern Ireland Renewable Industry Group (NIRIG) is at an advanced stage in the development of community benefit protocols. They have not asked to meet to discuss the potential benefits to local communities of nearby wind farms.

Sustainable Energy: Inter-departmental Working Group

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the work of the Inter-departmental Working Group on Sustainable Energy.
(AQW 6545/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Pursuant to AQW 5283/11-15, the Sustainable Energy Inter-departmental Working Group (SE IDWG) continues to work towards the implementation of the recommendations agreed by the Executive in February 2011.

In particular, a cost benefit analysis on the consolidation of energy vires was discussed at the SEIDWG meeting on 9 January 2012 and has been sent to the Sustainable Development Champions Group, chaired by OFMDFM, for consideration. Also, a draft Executive-wide Sustainable Energy Action Plan (SEAP), including a statement of leadership for the Executive on sustainable energy, was also discussed at the January meeting and is progressing well.

Both of these issues will be referred to the Executive for consideration as soon as agreement is reached.

Gas Network

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many properties have been connected to the gas network in each of the towns in the ten towns/cities licence area; and what percentage of households in each of these towns is now connected to the gas network.
(AQW 6551/11-15)

Mrs Foster: firmus energy has provided information as detailed below on the number of properties currently connected in each of the towns in their ten towns/cities licence area. The Department does not hold data on the percentage of households in each of these towns connected to the gas network.

Town/ City	Natural Gas Connections
Antrim	2,090
Armagh	230
Ballymena	1,490
Ballymoney	530
Banbridge	540
Coleraine	1,130
Craigavon	1,830
Londonderry	3,930
Limavady	430
Newry	800
Total	**13,000**

Renewable Heat Incentive

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 3328/11-15, to outline the work undertaken by her Department in the review of the public consultation on the potential design and implementation of a Renewable Heat Incentive, with particular reference to the introduction of a renewable heat initiative for domestic properties.
(AQW 6558/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Following on from the consultation on the design and implementation of the Northern Ireland Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) my Department has been carrying out further research and analysis to address some of the issues raised by stakeholders. This further analysis has included assessment of tariff levels and banding, consideration of eligible technologies and the treatment of large industrial sites. This work will complete shortly and will inform the final policy position.

The consultation proposed that a phased approach would be taken, with the non-domestic sector able to avail of the RHI from the outset, with a scheme for the domestic sector being introduced at a later date. In the interim, it was proposed to introduce Renewable Heat Premium Payments for the domestic market. The majority of those responding to the consultation agreed with this course of action. The arrangements for such premium payments will be considered once the RHI policy has been finalised.

Broadband Facilities in Ringsend, Coleraine

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans she has to address the limited broadband facilities in Ringsend, Coleraine.
(AQW 6583/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As I have stated in response to a number of Assembly Questions in recent months, over the past eight years my Department has taken forward a number of initiatives aimed at improving broadband access for consumers across Northern Ireland, particularly those located in rural areas. This includes the £51m Next Generation Broadband Project which has facilitated the roll-out of the highest level of fibre-to-the-cabinet technology in the UK. Under this project cabinet upgrades have been completed in three locations across the telephone exchange area from which premises in Ringsend are served i.e. the Aghadowey exchange, with the potential to deliver fixed-line broadband services of up to 40 megabits per second (Mbps).

In addition, my Department has also run the £1.9m Northern Ireland Broadband Fund through which there has been significant deployment of fixed-wireless broadband networks across many parts of Northern Ireland. One of the companies supported under the Fund i.e. North West Electronics is currently delivering fixed-wireless broadband services in the Ringsend area which can offer download speeds of between 10 Mbps and 100 Mbps.

Furthermore through DETI s contract with Onwave Ltd, which was announced on 6 January, satellite broadband services offering download speeds of between 6 Mbps per second and 10 Mbps are available across all areas of Northern Ireland

where the provision of fixed-line services is not economically viable. This contract replaces the previous contract with Avanti Communications which ran from 6 January 2009 to 5 January 2012.

Looking forward, my Department has secured £4.4m under the UK Coalition Government's Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) initiative which, together with its Budget allocations for 2011-2015 , will be used to extend the delivery of higher speed services into those areas of Northern Ireland where, despite previous investments, a minimum download speed of 2Mbps via fixed-line technology cannot currently be attained. DETI officials are also in discussion with BDUK to source additional funds to deliver an innovative project aimed at improving mobile broadband coverage across Northern Ireland. Work on scoping both projects is underway.

January Monitoring Round 2012

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, as a result of the January 2012 Monitoring Round, (i) how many jobs she expects to be created; (ii) in what sectors will these jobs be created; and (iii) how this figure will be monitored.
(AQW 6619/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There will be no impact on Invest NI's 2011 - 2015 job promotion targets as a result of the outcome of the January Monitoring Round. By 31 March 2015, Invest NI aims to have promoted over 25,000 new jobs. These will be drawn from a wide range of sectors and will include local SMEs, new and existing foreign-owned businesses and new business starts. Invest NI's progress against its job promotion targets will be monitored quarterly and reported on annually as part of the agency's formal annual reporting process.

Mobile Phone Operators

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the dates of the meetings she has held with representatives of (i) O2; (ii) Vodafone; (iii) Orange; (iv) T-Mobile; (v) 3; and (vi) the Mobile Operators Association; and what matters were discussed.
(AQW 6671/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In relation to the objective to bring about improvements in mobile voice and data services as set out in my Department's Telecommunications Action Plan for the period 2011-2015, officials are in early discussions with the four main MNOs i.e. Everything Everywhere (Orange/T-Mobile), O2, Three UK and Vodafone to highlight coverage issues and to ascertain what their investment plans might be going forward.

Department of the Environment

Driver and Vehicle Agency: Testing Centres

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 3773/11 - 15, whether he will undertake a study to establish if there are reasons for the significant differences in the percentage changes in the number of vehicles being re-tested in each of the testing centres, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 4866/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): Between the financial years 2005/06 and 2010/11, the Driver & Vehicle Agency saw an increase in the numbers of vehicle tests carried out from 698,843 to 950,035, or 35.94%. The numbers of vehicles retested increased from 141,929 in 2005/06 to 167,667 in 2010/11. In the same period the percentage of vehicles retested reduced from 20.31% to 17.65%.

The retest percentages for the requested period are shown in the table below.

Test Centre	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Armagh	22.53	22.23	21.56	18.60	17.90	17.18
Ballymena	17.83	18.36	18.23	17.76	17.68	17.78
Belfast	20.81	18.54	18.60	17.29	17.52	18.17
Coleraine	19.01	16.97	16.70	16.40	17.01	17.01
Cookstown	24.25	22.88	21.82	19.05	19.25	19.66
Craigavon	22.06	20.59	20.22	19.03	19.39	18.25
Downpatrick	17.69	17.20	16.08	15.19	15.84	15.69
Enniskillen	18.74	17.87	18.23	17.61	17.78	18.78
Larne	14.66	13.64	13.92	14.88	17.61	15.97

Test Centre	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Lisburn	20.81	16.19	15.21	14.86	14.25	14.30
Londonderry	20.79	19.63	19.11	18.72	19.57	19.19
Mallusk	21.65	19.45	19.00	17.40	16.97	17.36
Newry	19.78	16.79	16.18	15.75	16.92	18.26
Newtownards	19.82	19.22	19.88	19.82	18.06	16.90
Omagh	22.63	18.90	19.23	19.38	18.91	19.48
Overall	**20.31**	**18.66**	**18.38**	**17.57**	**17.66**	**17.65**

For the period 2010-11 the average percentage of re-tests was 17.65%. 13 out of 15 test centres fall within 2% of this average, eight within 1%.

It is recognised that there are differences between test centres in terms of the percentages of re-tests over the last five years. There are a number of factors that impact on pass/fail rates including the age and mileage of the vehicles tested and the quality of the preparatory work carried out in advance. However, prima facie, differentials in pass rate could give rise to questions being raised.

A key issue is the quality and integrity of the test and test process. DVA has put in place a range of measures to ensure that tests are conducted to high and consistent standards including initial training of new entrants, refresher training for existing staff, regular audits of operational procedures, regular audit inspections of each vehicle examiner's work, monitoring of pass/fail statistics and reasons for failure at test centre and individual level, and application of ISO 9001 quality control standards.

The Agency currently captures the top 12 reasons for test failure for all test centres, and publishes the data on a monthly basis at http://www.dvtani.gov.uk/home/index.asp. I would welcome hearing further views on this matter.

A37, Broad Road: Human Waste Sludge Site

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment what tests are carried out by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency on the site neighbouring site the human waste sludge site on the A37 Broad Road, Limavady, to establish if there is any contamination as a result of leachate.
(AQW 5012/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency granted a mobile plant licence to a company to permit the storage and treatment of sewage sludge in an old quarry alongside the A37 Limavady to Coleraine Road. This licence has been revoked and ceased to exist from the 4 January 2012.

The licence included a range of conditions to ensure the sludge was managed

properly and fully complied with waste legislation. The operator installed a fully contained drainage system for runoff and this was conditioned in the waste management licence.

The mobile plant licence for the site did not require tests to be carried out on

any neighbouring site. At no time did NIEA staff record a breach of this condition or receive evidence or complaints of pollution off site. If reports arose of pollution off site, these would be investigated.

Belfast International Airport: Illegal Car Parks

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQO 867/11-15, in relation to the illegal car parks in the vicinity of Belfast International Airport, to detail (i) the total number of car parking spaces; (ii) the location of each car park; and (iii) how long each car park has been in operation.
(AQW 5505/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

(i) Advice provided to DOE from the airport and others confirms there are a number of unauthorised car parks, with six currently under investigation. It is not possible to be precise on the number of spaces but the six sites cover 4.5 hectares. The number of spaces varies with the seasons and the numbers vary depending on the manner of parking. However, 1100+ above places may be available. In planning terms the number of parking spaces is not relevant to the investigation as the key issue is that the unauthorised use exists and on that basis formal enforcement action is being taken.

(ii) & (iii) My officials can only give details of the enforcement investigations that are in the public domain. The following table gives the location of sites currently the subject of investigation, the dates when these were reported to the Department and the initial date enforcement action was instigated (in all cases enforcement investigations remain open):

10 Crookedstone Road, Aldergrove	Breach of planning control reported to the Department 09/02/2005 Enforcement Notice Served 20/07/2007
	Enforcement Notice Served on adjacent lands 24/05/2011
108 Ballyrobin Road, Aldergrove	Breach of planning control reported to the Department 27/05/2005 Enforcement notice Served 07/11/2005
	Enforcement Notice Served on additional lands 04/01/2011
26 Killead Road, Aldergrove	Breach of planning control reported to the Department 02/12/2004 Enforcement Notice Served 07/05/2005
	Enforcement Notice Served on additional lands 04/01/2011
92 Old Ballyrobin Road, Aldergrove	Breach of planning control reported to the Department 09/07/2007 Enforcement Notice Served 08/07/2011
6 Antrim Rd, Aldergrove	Breach of planning control reported to the Department 11/05/2011 Planning Application submitted for proposed car storage compound incorporating existing shed and hardstanding for off site car hire business 31/08/2011
5 Seacash Road, Glenavy	Breach of planning control reported to the Department 15/08/2011 Planning Application submitted for a car park 18/10/2011

Local Government: Debt

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the current strategies that are in place to reduce the level of debt in local councils.
(AQW 5553/11-15)

Mr Attwood: District Councils are bodies corporate as defined in the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 and as such are independent of the Executive and the department and directly responsible for decisions regarding their own financial affairs.

You will be aware of recent information published on debt levels. This confirms another element in the complexity of RPA, particularly on management of assets and debts. Councils are and need to be mindful of debt profile and I am looking at what powers central government may or may not need in this regard. That said, I acknowledge the work of Belfast City Council in times of need gathering together a package of monies to provide a stimulus in the City area. Monies, including borrowed monies, wisely deployed in advance of RPA can be important to help come through the downturn.

I again enclose a Schedule of Council Debt across all heads of council borrowing. I have asked officials to conduct an audit of Northern Ireland council debt levels compared with other jurisdictions.

SCHEDULE 1 Total Council debt as of 30 November 2011

Council	Total	11 Model Structure
Antrim	15,182,481	61,225,928
Newtownabbey	46,043,447	
Ards	13,971,249	42,420,381
North Down	28,449,132	
Armagh	27,605,117	56,261,226
Banbridge	20,663,518	
Craigavon	7,992,591	

Council	Total	11 Model Structure
Ballymena	24,436,386	60,133,653
Carrickfergus	21,469,985	
Larne	14,227,282	
Ballymoney	9,454,077	59,113,760
Coleraine	28,508,954	
Limavady	12,395,920	
Moyle	8,754,809	
Cookstown	1,487,123	4,968,563
Dungannon	3,481,440	
Magherafelt	0	
Castlereagh *	18,612,585	37,138,466
Lisburn	18,525,881	
Derry	26,149,594	28,459,326
Strabane	2,309,732	
Down	23,928,145	42,728,419
Newry & Mourne	18,800,274	
Fermanagh	3,505,713	13,719,690
Omagh	10,213,977	
Belfast	25,852,530	25,852,530
Total	**432,021,942**	

* Certain areas of Castlereagh Borough Council will merge with Belfast City Council under the proposed 11 model structure.

Hydraulic Fracturing: Independent Environmental Impact Assessment

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment (i) for his assessment of his Department's ability to carry out an independent environmental impact assessment of the fracking process; and (ii) whether he would consider commencing such an assessment. **(AQW 5791/11-15)**

Mr Attwood: The Departments powers under the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (NI) 1999 relate to the requirement to undertake Environmental Impact Assessment only where development proposals are the subject of a planning application. I am assessing if, under EU requirements, I have greater authority in relation to PDRs. The Department has no general power to seek an environmental impact statement where development proposals have not been submitted, although I am seeking legal advice in this regard. If a planning application to carry out hydraulic fracturing is submitted to the Department for consideration, it is likely to be accompanied by an environmental statement. The environmental statement is produced by the applicant and would contain such information as is reasonably required for the Department and its consultees to assess the environmental effects of the development.

I am fully aware of the widespread concerns in relation to the process and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency is continuing to supplement its knowledge of the process through reviewing emerging research, studying case studies from other parts of the world and liaising with counterparts in other Environment Agencies in Britain and Ireland, and other countries where fracking is currently proposed or taking place. That is why I will ensure that, at both Ministerial and official level, liaison with counterparts in the RoI will continue to allow a better understanding of the environmental risks resulting from this process for the mutual benefit of both jurisdictions as the current area of exploration straddles both sides of the border.

In terms of the current exploration process there are certain permitted development rights (i.e. where planning permission is not required) for limited activity such as drilling bore holes, carrying out seismic surveys and other evacuations for a period of up to four months. These rights are subject to conditions including pre-commencement notification to the Department giving details of the location, target mineral, details of plant and operations and anticipated timescale. I will ensure that all requirements in this regard are strictly honoured. I must stress they do not in any way extend to the extraction of shale gas which constitutes development requiring planning permission and relate solely to exploration. If the exploration works themselves are considered to require Environmental Impact Assessment the current legislation makes it clear that in such circumstances permitted

development rights do not apply. Should any pre-commencement notifications be submitted the Department will carefully consider this issue in consultation with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

Areas of Special Scientific Interest

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the Restoration Orders imposed since 1 April 2000, following damage to Areas of Special Scientific Interest.
(AQW 6098/11-15)

Mr Attwood: One Restoration Order has been imposed since 1 April 2000. The restoration requirements referred to Knockninny Hill ASSI and was requested by the Department in the case of DOE - V - Foster on 23 May 2006.

I have asked officials to advise on the future scope for use of Restoration Orders, mindful of the answer to AQW 6098, 6099 and 6102 respectively.

Areas of Special Scientific Interest

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment to provide details of all cases where prosecutions have been initiated for damage to Areas of Special Scientific Interest from 1 April 2008 to 31 December 2011.
(AQW 6099/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As a result of damage caused to Moneystaghan Bog Area of Special Scientific Interest in June 2009 the Department instigated proceedings against Mr P McErlean. The defendant pleaded guilty before the court on 7 March 2011 and was given an Absolute Discharge.

Planning Policy Statement 21

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications for single dwellings in the countryside have been approved since the introduction of PPS 21.
(AQW 6101/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Since the introduction of the finalised version of PPS 21 on 1st June 2010 the Department has approved 3116 planning applications for single dwellings in the countryside.

This data has been extracted from the Department's published Development Management Statistics which provides data up to 30th September. The next quarterly statistics are due for publication in March 2012.

Areas of Special Scientific Interest

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment how many Areas of Special Scientific Interest have been declared in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6102/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department has declared 25 Areas of Special Scientific Interest in each of the last three years.

Discharge Consents: Glynn River and Tributaries

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 5761/11-15, to provide details of when discharges were permitted under each of the two discharge consents that were issued.
(AQW 6149/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has issued 2 consents to Bord Gáis Energy (Northern Ireland) for discharges of site drainage from an exploratory borehole site into the Raloo Water, a tributary of the Glynn River, near Glenoe.

Both consents (consent nos. 106/11 and 107/11) permitting the discharges were issued by the Department on 19 July 2011. These consents authorise the discharge of site drainage from the premises at any time, providing all conditions of consent are complied with.

Motorists Approaching Horse-riders on Roads

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the obligations on motorists when approaching horse-riders on roads; and what action can be taken against those motorists who wilfully cause distress or agitation to horses by the way in which they drive.
(AQW 6186/11-15)

Mr Attwood: There is a general obligation on all motorists to drive safely in accordance with the law and the Highway Code and to be aware of all potential hazards.

While there are no legal obligations dealing specifically with how drivers should approach horse-riders on roads, the Highway Code highlights the extra care that is required in relation to vulnerable road users including horse riders and horse-drawn vehicles especially when over-taking. Rule 215 advises drivers to always pass wide and slowly, to heed any request to slow down or stop

and to take great care and treat all horses as potential hazards as they can be unpredictable despite the efforts of their riders or drivers.

Any motorist wilfully causing distress or agitation to horses by the way they drive can be charged with 'careless or inconsiderate driving' and if convicted would be liable to 3-9 penalty points and a maximum fine of up to £5,000.

Driver and Vehicle Agency: Proposed Changes

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the changes proposed for the Driver and Vehicle Agency.
(AQW 6481/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Driver and Vehicle Agency is part of the Department of the Environment and fulfils a vital role in the licensing, testing and enforcement of legislation concerning drivers, vehicles and operators. It also completes work with regard to the excepted matter of vehicle licensing under an agreement between the Secretary of State for Transport and the Department.

A range of changes to relevant policy and legislation are currently being made. These include the implementation of the Goods Vehicles Act 2010, the Taxis Act 2008 and changes to the MOT test in line with changes to European legislation.

The Agency is proceeding with careful planning for the implementation of all of these changes, to ensure continuing high levels of customer service and operational efficiency in this developing environment.

As I have previously outlined and confirmed, I have and continue to make robust representation to the London Government on the services of DVA, its future work, protection of jobs and the particular circumstances in NI including a land border.

Wind Turbines

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of the Environment what is the average timescale for getting planning approval for a single wind turbine in a rural area.
(AQO 1053/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In the 2010/11 Business Year the average time taken to reach approval for a single wind turbine in the rural area was 115 days (23 weeks).

It is important to note that Planning is currently engaged in an exercise to cleanse and quality assure data relating to renewable energy applications, including wind turbines, prior to April 2011. As such the data provided in this response may differ from that previously published and it may in itself be subject to revision.

Local Government

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of the Environment for an estimate of the savings that could be achieved if local councils were to be reorganised.
(AQO 1062/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) economic appraisal, which covered local government service delivery in its entirety, identified a number of efficiency opportunities as part of the implementation of the reform programme. In total, the appraisal detailed projected savings of £438 million over a 25-year period, for an upfront investment of £118 million.

In addition, the sector's own Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency (ICE) programme has put forward a number of specific efficiencies covering customer-facing services, information and communication technologies, human resources, payroll and procurement for detailed analysis. Their report anticipates that the implementation of this programme will achieve savings in the range of £257 million to £570 million, also over 25-years. These figures are to be treated as indicative but the sector is confident that savings will be at the higher end of these projections.

However, the PwC economic appraisal for local government reform was undertaken in 2009. A refresh of the appraisal, to take account of the sector's work on ICE, will be carried out soon to further refine the costs and benefits of local government reform.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Software Development Industry

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people are employed in the software development industry, broken down by (i) constituency; and (ii) council area.
(AQW 6134/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Estimates at this level of detail are only available from the Census of Employment on a biennial basis. The most up-to-date figures relate to September 2009 and are produced on the 1992 Parliamentary Constituency boundaries that were current at the time.

The number of employee jobs in the software development industry by Parliamentary Constituency is shown in Table 1 and the number of employee jobs by District Council is shown in Table 2.

Table 1: Number of employee jobs in the 'software development industry' by Parliamentary Constituency1

Parliamentary Constituency	Number of Employee Jobs
Belfast East	642
Belfast North	325
Belfast South	2403
Belfast West	*
East Antrim	39
East Londonderry	43
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	*
Foyle	508
Lagan Valley	100
Mid Ulster	48
Newry And Armagh	72
North Antrim	27
North Down	45
South Antrim	166
South Down	30
Strangford	73
Upper Bann	47
West Tyrone	*
Total	**5020**

* Not shown due to confidentiality constraints.

1 Based on 1992 Parliamentary Constituency boundaries

Source: Census of Employment, 2009

Table 2: Number of employee jobs in the 'software development industry' by District Council

District Council	Number of Employee Jobs
Antrim	166
Ards	*
Armagh	36
Ballymena	*
Ballymoney	*
Banbridge	*
Belfast	3410
Carrickfergus	14
Castlereagh	70
Coleraine	43
Cookstown	31
Craigavon	43
Derry	508

District Council	Number of Employee Jobs
Down	13
Dungannon	*
Fermanagh	*
Larne	*
Lisburn	97
Magherafelt	12
Moyle	16
Newry & Mourne	52
Newtownabbey	*
North Down	44
Omagh	*
Strabane	*
Total	**5020**

* Not shown due to confidentiality constraints.

Source: Census of Employment, 2009

Civil Servants: Retirement Figures

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) how many civil servants have retired in each of the last five years; and (ii) the average annual pension received, broken down by grade 1, 2 and 3.
(AQW 6143/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The number of civil servants that have retired in each of the last five years is set out in the table below.

	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010	12010/2011
No of retired Civil Servants	668	622	445	405	602

Note:

1 The Department of Justice retirement figures have been included from 12 April 2010.

The average annual pension received, broken down by grade 1, 2, and 3 is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Vacant Properties

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 5740/11-15, to provide a breakdown of the types of vacant properties.
(AQW 6150/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The table overleaf lists the number of vacant properties as at 11th December 2011 split by Sector (Domestic and Non-Domestic) and the Class of the property.

Number of Vacant Properties as at 11th December 2011 split by Sector and Class of Property

Primary Property Class	Domestic	Non-Domestic	Grand Total
Privately Built Housing	36,150	194	36,344
Public Built Housing	5,367	1	5,368
Warehouses, Stores, Workshops, (Non-IND) Garages	1	4,478	4,479
Offices (Includes Banks and Post Offices)	0	3,894	3,894
Shops, Showrooms, Supermarkets etc	0	3,415	3,415

Primary Property Class	Domestic	Non-Domestic	Grand Total
Primary Property Class Not Available	97	1,730	1,827
Car Parks	0	842	842
Manufactories	0	469	469
Non Sporting Recreational Facility	0	262	262
Sites and Yards	0	148	148
Commercial Unclassified	0	127	127
Advertising Stations and Signs	0	122	122
Closed Hereditaments	41	69	110
Schools etc	0	110	110
Hospitals, Clinics, Surgeries, Homes	0	80	80
Licensed Premises	0	71	71
Sporting Recreational	0	55	55
Hotels etc Unlicensed	0	52	52
Filling Stations	0	40	40
Law and Order Establishments	0	36	36
Miscellaneous Public Service Properties	0	15	15
Churches, Church Halls etc	0	14	14
Defence Hereditaments and Coast Guard	0	14	14
Nurseries and Garden Centres	0	13	13
Others	6	58	64
Total	**41,662**	**16,309**	**57,971**

Notes: Primary Property Class not Validated

Non-domestic properties, as presented in this table, include mixed properties

Motor Vehicle Fleet Policy

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether someone who is not directly employed by the Civil Service, but who uses a motor vehicle which is in the custody or control of the Northern Ireland Public Service, is covered under the terms of the current motor vehicle fleet policy.
(AQW 6180/11-15)

Mr Wilson: A person who is not directly employed by the Civil Service, but who uses a motor vehicle which is in the custody or control of the Northern Ireland Public Service is covered under the terms of the current motor vehicle fleet policy.

The Persons or classes of persons entitled to drive are any person on the order or with the permission of the policyholder (NI Public Service), provided that the person driving holds a licence to drive the vehicle or has held and is not disqualified from holding or obtaining such a licence.

Corporation Tax

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the discussions with Treasury in relation to the devolution of powers to alter the rate of corporation tax.
(AQW 6315/11-15)

Mr Wilson: We continue to work with UK Government Ministers to move this work forward as quickly as possible and I am pleased to say that we had a useful first meeting of the Ministerial Working Group (MWG) in December. The Group agreed a Terms of Reference and work programme aimed at examining in detail the issues raised during the course of the recent Government consultation, particularly those in relation to the cost and practical implications of devolving corporation tax powers.

My officials and their colleagues in OFMDFM and DETI have been following up on these issues with their counterparts in the Treasury and the MWG hopes to meet towards the end of February / early March to consider the progress that has been achieved by then. Overall, the MWG aims to produce a report in summer 2012 and a decision will be taken by the Government on whether it will agree to the devolution of these powers following this.

DFP: Transfer of Functions to Local Government

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, for each of the last five years, to detail the functions that (i) have been transferred; and (ii) are planned to be transferred from his Department to local councils, and of these, to detail (a) the reason behind the transfer of each function; (b) whether additional funding was offered to local councils to assist them in carrying out the functions; and (c) the cost, to his Department, of the final year when each of the functions were the responsibility of his Department; and (iii) may be transferred from his Department to local councils at a future date,
(AQW 6321/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My Department has not transferred any functions in the last five years and is not planning to transfer any functions to local councils in the foreseeable future.

Corporation Tax

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what additional measures he intends to put in place to ensure that any change in the rate of corporation tax, paid for by cuts to the public sector, will lead to a fairer and more equal society.
(AQW 6343/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Executive's objective in seeking the power to set the rate of Corporation Tax is aimed at securing a policy lever that could potentially offer the Executive a major opportunity to bring about a step change in Northern Ireland's economic performance. The draft Programme for Government and Economic Strategy set out the broad range of measures that the Executive will take in terms of promoting jobs, increasing skills, supporting innovation, and developing our infrastructure to increase competitiveness and productivity and ensure that the local business base can exploit the opportunities that might be presented by any reduced rate of Corporation Tax. Together these actions will help generate employment and wealth, and ensure that everyone in Northern Ireland will have an opportunity to contribute to and benefit from increased prosperity and living standards.

DFP: 0845 Numbers

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much revenue has been raised by his Department in each of the last three financial years by the usage of 0845 numbers,
(AQW 6373/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My Department has not raised any revenue in the last three financial years by the usage of 0845 numbers.

Air Passenger Duty

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the devolution of Air Passenger Duty powers will cover the duty on private jets; and whether he will consider increasing the duty.
(AQW 6446/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The draft Programme for Government has committed the Executive to eliminating Air Passenger Duty on direct long haul flights. While the precise arrangements for the devolution of these powers are still under discussion it is not anticipated that we will have powers beyond the ability to set the rate of duty for such flights. For example, powers to define the type of aircraft that are subject to duty or how the different Bands are defined are not expected to be devolved.

The Chancellor's 2011 Autumn Statement confirmed the Government's plans to extend APD to business jets of 5.7 tonnes or more, effective from 1 April 2013. Any such direct long haul flights from Northern Ireland

will therefore be subject to the rate set by the Assembly. I would not expect us to have the power to set a different rate for different types of aircraft.

Trade Unions: Funding

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the level of funding his Department allocated to each trade union in the (i) 2000/01; (ii) 2005/06; and (iii) 2010/11 financial years.
(AQW 6467/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My Department did not allocate funding to any of the trade unions in 2005-06 or 2010-11.

In line with its Records Management Policy my Department retains only those financial records which relate to the current and six previous financial years. Consequently it is not possible to provide information relating to the 2000-01 financial year.

Occupational Health Assessment: Waiting Times

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the average waiting time for an occupational health assessment; (ii) how long it takes to complete an assessment, following an initial consultation; (iii) how many people are awaiting an assessment; and (iv) what procedures are in place to speed up the process for priority cases.
(AQW 6596/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Northern Ireland Civil Service Occupational Health Service (OHS) carries out occupational health assessments on behalf of NICS departments. These are undertaken in their Belfast centre (75% of cases) Monday to Friday and in two external centres (25% of cases), Ballykelly and Craigavon on one day per week in each location.

There are two main types of assessment – sickness absence and general fitness. For the period 1st April 2011 – 31st December 2011, the average waiting time for a sickness absence assessment in Belfast was: 11 working days and for a general fitness assessment: 12 working days. In the external assessment centres, the average waiting time for a sickness absence assessment was: 17 working days and for a general fitness assessment: 15 working days

For those assessments that do not require further information or external independent assessment (over 95% of all referrals), the assessments are completed within 24 hours of the initial consultation. Cases requiring further information from eg general practitioners or hospital consultants (less than 5%) will have a preliminary report issued within 24 hours and a follow-up report issued when additional information is received, usually within three weeks of requesting the information.

As of 19th January 2012, there are 129 cases waiting with appointments scheduled and 62 cases waiting to be given appointments.

If NICS Departments require a priority assessment, a procedure is in place whereby the referring body makes telephone contact with the OHS and a suitable appointment is arranged – this can be the same day or within 24 hours if necessary.

Civil Service: Permanent Staff

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the total number of people employed in the Civil Service in each of the last five years.
(AQW 6741/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The information requested is set out in the table overleaf.

NICS Permanent Staff in Post (Headcount)
1 January 2007 - 1 January 2011

Year	Total Staff
2007	30,366
2008	28,257
2009	27,349
2010	27,399
2011	27,701

Notes

Data sourced from HRMS, HR Connect and additional DOJ data sources.

Figures are based on 1st January each year. Figures are staff Headcount.

Includes all Permanent NICS staff.

Data excludes uniformed staff in the NI Prison Service.

The table found in Annex 1 (page 31) of the publication 'Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service' (link below) details status changes resulting in movement of staff into or out of the NICS as well as the years in which these changes occurred, and the approximate number of staff involved.

http://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/NICS_Equality_Stats_2011.html

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Health Service: Patients in Care Homes

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of Health Service patients presently being looked after in (i) residential care homes; and (ii) nursing care homes, and the average cost of each.
(AQW 6214/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): At 31 December 2011 (latest information available), 4,137 patients were receiving residential care packages and 8,147 patients were receiving nursing care home packages.

The average weekly cost per person per week is:

- Residential Care Homes (children and adults) - £727
- Nursing Care Homes (adults only) - £591

Hospital Car Parks: Revenue

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the annual revenue gained from hospital car parks in each of the last five years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area.
(AQW 6216/11-15)

Mr Poots: Where it is available, gross annual revenue from car parking is provided in the attached table. No data is available for 2006/2007 as it has not been possible to extract this from legacy Trust records.

Trust	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Northern	0	0	0	0
Southern	0	0	£200,042	£442,608
Western	Data unavailable	£131,259	£123,029	£116,049
* Belfast	£977,000	£952,430	£949,564	£1,000,998
South Eastern	£839,993	£1,049,901	£1,070,984	£1,081,609
Total	**£1,816,993**	**£2,133,590.00**	**£2,343,619.00**	**£2,641,264.00**

* The main car park on the Royal Group of Hospitals site is run under a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contract on a 20 year licence (ending in 2016) to build and operate a car park. Income from that car park goes to the contractor.

Forster Green Hospital Site, Belfast

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the planned use of the site at Forster Green Hospital, Belfast.
(AQW 6269/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Forster Green Hospital site in Belfast is approximately 38 acres in size.

A number of health facilities are currently planned to remain on the Forster Green site, namely the Knockbreda Health & Wellbeing Centre, Beechcroft House Adolescent Mental Health Unit and Child and Family Centre, the Regional Medical Physics Agency and a number of administration services.

Patients will transfer from the main Forster Green Hospital building to the new Neurology ward at Musgrave Park by February 2012.

The Belfast HSC Trust is currently considering the future strategic need for this part of the Forster Green hospital site for health use. If it is not required for health use it will be declared surplus and made available for disposal.

Approximately 26 acres of land on the Forster Green is located either outside the development limit or within the designated Local Landscape Policy Areas proposed under BMAP i.e. “green land” unavailable for development. My Department has had some discussions with Castlereagh Borough Council regarding their interest in acquiring part of this site for a playpark.

Forster Green Hospital Site, Belfast

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the acreage of the site at Forster Green Hospital, Belfast.
(AQW 6270/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Forster Green Hospital site in Belfast is approximately 38 acres in size.

A number of health facilities are currently planned to remain on the Forster Green site, namely the Knockbreda Health & Wellbeing Centre, Beechcroft House Adolescent Mental Health Unit and Child and Family Centre, the Regional Medical Physics Agency and a number of administration services.

Patients will transfer from the main Forster Green Hospital building to the new Neurology ward at Musgrave Park by February 2012.

The Belfast HSC Trust is currently considering the future strategic need for this part of the Forster Green hospital site for health use. If it is not required for health use it will be declared surplus and made available for disposal.

Approximately 26 acres of land on the Forster Green is located either outside the development limit or within the designated Local Landscape Policy Areas proposed under BMAP i.e. "green land" unavailable for development. My Department has had some discussions with Castlereagh Borough Council regarding their interest in acquiring part of this site for a playpark.

Cross-departmental Funding for Health Promotion/Preventative Spending Programmes

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) whether cross-departmental funding for health promotion/preventative spending programmes will be made available during this mandate; and (ii) to outline the areas under his remit where there is potential for greater cross-departmental working and joined up thinking.
(AQW 6284/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health Promotion activity is inherent across health and social care provision, and I am committed to increasing the percentage of my Department's overall budget that is spent on health promotion.

In addition I have secured the agreement of Executive colleagues to the development of a new Public Health Strategic framework, based on most recent evidence, which will strengthen the cross government and cross – sectoral drive to improve health and reduce health inequalities. This work is underway with a view to publishing a consultation document in Spring 2012 and a final framework by the end of the year. This development work will identify further areas for greater collaboration and potential investment across departments.

Payment of Invoices to Small Businesses

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 5626/11-15, how many invoices have been paid within ten days in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6297/11-15)

Mr Poots: Pursuant to AQW 5626/11-15, the table below shows the number of non-HSC invoices paid within ten days by the Northern Trust for 2009/10, 2010/11 and the eight months ended 30 November 2011.

	Number of invoices paid within 10 days
2009/10	51,254
2010/11	51,729
April – November 2011	30,585

Nursing Staff: Temporary Numbers

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been spent on temporary nursing staff in each of the last five years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area.
(AQW 6298/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is attached at Tab A which provides a breakdown of the expenditure on agency, bank and temporary nursing staff for the four years 2007/08 to 2010/11. Information is only available for the last 4 years in the format requested as the Health Service was restructured as a result of RPA and prior to April 2007 the Trusts did not exist in their current format.

TAB A

The figures in the table below have been provided by the Health and Social Care Trusts and represent Nurses and Midwives.

Trust Name	Cost of Agency Nurses				Cost of Bank Nurses				Cost of Temporary Nurses			
	07/08 £000k	08/09 £000k	09/10 £000k	10/11 £000k	07/08 £000k	08/09 £000k	09/10 £000k	10/11 £000k	07/08 £000k	08/09 £000k	09/10 £000k	10/11 £000k
Northern Trust	766,407	1,071,311	540,222	611,403	3,315,756	4,489,956	4,167,913	5,137,518	450,084	1,499,386	1,975,319	1,933,648
Western Trust	456,676	901,552	1,821,762	1,425,521	Unable to provide	3,050,000	2,970,000	3,910,000	Unable to provide this information as temporary nursing contracts are not coded separately.			
Belfast Trust	9,032,098	8,828,841	6,066,594	2,910,296	3,880,000	7,103,000	11,032,000	12,834,000	6,599,000	3,779,000	3,220,000	3,015,000
Southern Trust	881,491	1,288,152	1,185,709	452,733	1,029.000	2,286.000	4,916.000	5,628.000	n/a	3,981,000	3,751,000	2,189,000
South Eastern Trust	2,000,740	2,930,934	3,097,697	1,491,884	1,570,507	1,980,635	2,610,671	3,763,870	Unable to provide this information as temporary nursing contracts are not coded separately.			
Total	13,137,412	15,020,790	12,711,984	6,891,837	9,795,263	18,909,591	25,696,584	31,273,388	7,049,084	9,259,386	8,946,319	7,137,648

* The Ambulance service is the 6th Trust but provided a NIL return as they do not employ nursing staff.

Nursing Rotas

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, for each of the last three years, to detail the number of gaps, each month, in the nursing rota (i) at the Antrim Area Hospital; and (b) in each Health and Social Care Trust area.
(AQW 6299/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested would only be available at a disproportionate cost to Trusts to extract this information.

DHSSPS: Transfer of Functions to Local Government

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, for each of the last five years, to detail the functions that (i) have been transferred; and (ii) are planned to be transferred from his Department to local councils, and of these, to detail (a) the reason behind the transfer of each function; (b) whether additional funding was offered to local councils to assist them in carrying out the functions; and (c) the cost, to his Department, of the final year when each of the functions were the responsibility of his Department; and (iii) may be transferred from his Department to local councils at a future date,
(AQW 6322/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has not transferred any functions to local councils in the past five years and there are no current plans to transfer any of its functions to local councils in the future.

The collaborative working arrangements that are already in place between the Public Health Agency and local councils should also support the proposed community planning and well-being role envisaged for local government.

Community Pharmacies

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department intends to take, following the judgement in favour of local pharmacies.
(AQW 6341/11-15)

Mr Poots: Mr Justice Treacy made his judgement on the Judicial Review, brought by CPNI against changes to pharmacy remuneration made by the Department and the HSC Board on 21 December 2011 and also announced that a remedy hearing was scheduled for 9 January 2012. However, the full written judgement was not issued until 10 January 2012 and a date for a remedies hearing is still to be set.

However, I have already indicated to CPNI that once I had considered the written judgement and the outcome of the remedy hearing I will meet with them, as soon as possible thereafter, to discuss the way forward. I remain committed to this and I look forward to moving the situation forward.

Community Pharmacies

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what immediate measures he intends to put in place to support local pharmacies that are under financial pressure, as a result of his Department's changes to funding.
(AQW 6342/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am currently considering the implications of the judgement made by Mr Justice Treacy on the Judicial Review brought by CPNI against the changes to pharmacy remuneration and will meet with CPNI in due course to discuss the way forward. However, the HSC Board, as part of its routine business continuity role, monitors the provision of all commissioned health and social care services including community pharmacy services. The Board has been working with CPNI to establish the extent of the financial pressures that some pharmacies may be facing and considering ways in which some further alleviation may be provided to them if necessary.

Tobacco Advertising Ban: Timescale

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the timescale for a tobacco advertising ban.
(AQW 6371/11-15)

Mr Poots: In keeping with the rest of the UK, I will be adopting a two-phased approach to the introduction of a display ban on tobacco products in retail outlets. It is intended, in Northern Ireland, that the ban will apply to large shops from October 2012, and for small shops, from 6 April 2015. A large shop is defined as having an internal sales area greater than 280 square metres.

Sisters of Nazareth

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the funding allocated to institutions operated by the Sisters of Nazareth, broken down by constituency, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6380/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is not possible to provide funding information by constituency area. However, the funding allocated to institutions operated by the Sisters of Nazareth in each of the last three years, by HSC Trust, is as per the following table:

HSC Trust	2011/2012 *(YTD) £	2010/2011 £	2009/2010 £
Belfast	634,389	725,992	775,461
Western	593,957	869,506	913,065
Southern	46,160	77,247	74,746
Total	**1,274,506**	**1,672,745**	**1,763,272**

* 31 December 2011

Banbridge Poly Clinic: X-ray Results

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what is the target for the return of x-ray results for patients at the Banbridge Poly Clinic; and (ii) the average time it took for patients to receive the results in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6387/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) I have not currently set a Ministerial target relating specifically to the reporting time for x-ray results. The Southern HSC Trust have, however, informed me that they are currently working towards an internal HSC Trust target where they aim to report, verify and dispatch the results of x-rays to the source of the referral within 28 days of the test being performed.

(ii) Reporting times for x-ray results at the Banbridge Poly Clinic are available from 2010/11. The waiting times, which are collected in aggregate time bands, for 2010/11 and 2011/12 (to the end of December 2011) are outlined in the table below.

Year	No. of x-ray results received by the referrer at the Banbridge Poly Clinic (by length of time waiting, in days, from test being performed to results being reported, verified and dispatched)						Total
	0-2	3-7	8-14	15-21	22-28	>28	
2010/11	1,444	1,039	597	189	129	1,373	4,771
2011/121	796	498	504	931	884	78	3,691

Source: Southern HSC Trust

1 Relates to the period 01/04/11 to 31/12/11

Given that these data are collected by aggregate time band, it is not possible to calculate the average waiting time for results to be reported, verified and dispatched. It is however possible to calculate median waiting time band, a similar statistical measure. The median waiting time band for 2010/11 was '3 to 7 days' and the median waiting timeband for 2011/121 was '15 to 21 days'.

DHSSPS: 0845 Numbers

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much revenue has been raised by his Department in each of the last three financial years by the usage of 0845 numbers,
(AQW 6394/11-15)

Mr Poots: No revenue has been raised by my Department or its Arms Length Bodies in each of the last three financial years through the usage of 0845 numbers.

Shared Services

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an estimate of the potential savings that could be made if the proposed model on shared services is implemented in its current form.
(AQW 6412/11-15)

Mr Poots: The shared services element of the health and social care Business Services Transformation Programme is projected to both improve delivery of the services in question (notably financial transactions, payroll, HR and procurement) and save money.

The financial savings are projected to amount to some £119m over the 10 years of the Programme to 2019-20, and will allow a greater concentration of HSC resources on front line care.

Business Services Transformation Programme

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an estimate of the number of jobs that may be lost as a result of the Business Services Transformation Programme.
(AQW 6414/11-15)

Mr Poots: The purpose of the Business Services Transformation Programme (BSTP) is to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the health and social care sector. Since the HSC, like all public services, must live within its means, failure to achieve such gains in support services would increase the pressure on front line services and jobs.

That is the context in which the BSTP is being taken forward. Viewed in isolation, however, this element of the Programme is projected to lead to a reduction of approximately 100 posts, in line with its phased implementation in the latter half of 2012 in such back-office functions as financial transactions, payroll, HR and procurement.

Category M Prescriptions

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total cost incurred by his Department in relation to the 2010 judicial review that was initiated by Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland, on payments for category M prescriptions.
(AQW 6458/11-15)

Mr Poots: The legal costs incurred by my Department in relation to the 2010 judicial review initiated by Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland on payments for category M prescriptions totalled £151,379.99 including VAT.

DHSSPS: Civil Servants from the Foyle Constituency who Work in Greater Belfast

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the total number of civil servants in his Department who live in the Foyle constituency and travel to work in the Greater Belfast area; and the total cost to his Department for subsidising the travel.
(AQW 6472/11-15)

Mr Poots: Three DHSSPS staff live in the Foyle constituency and travel to work in the Greater Belfast area.

The total cost to DHSSPS for subsidising the travel costs of civil servants who live in the Foyle constituency and travel to Greater Belfast between 1 January and 30 November 2011 was £105.84.

Breast Implants

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an estimate of the number of women who have had breast implants in each of the last five years; and what medical advice his Department is currently offering to these women.
(AQW 6480/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of breast implant operations carried out in HSC Hospitals in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years is detailed below.

Year	Operations
2006/07	76
2007/08	121
2008/09	103
2009/10	87
2010/11	117

It is not known how many women have received breast implants outside HSC hospitals.

Information for women considering breast implants has been produced by the Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Agency.
http://www.mhra.gov.uk/home/groups/dts-bi/documents/websiteresources/con2022634.pdf

The Department issued guidance for General Practitioners and hospital doctors who may be consulted by patients with breast implants on 13 January 2012.

Dental Services

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 4877/11-15, to detail the public engagement and consultation which will be carried with those people affected by the changes in dental services, as a result of the proposals for the dental services budget.
(AQW 6486/11-15)

Mr Poots: Proposals for changes to the General Dental Services which could potentially affect the treatments available to patients will be the subject of consultation with patients groups and the dental profession. The consultation will also be open to the public. My Department is also engaged with the British Dental Association (NI) on the proposals and has meetings planned in January and February to discuss them further.

My Department will also engage with the Assembly Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety on proposals which would involve regulatory changes, following the consultation and meetings with the British Dental Association (NI).

Gastric Band Surgery

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what provision is available for people who wish to undergo gastric band surgery; (ii) if provision is not available, where patients could receive this service; and (iii) what assistance is available for patients who would need to travel to receive this service.
(AQW 6488/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Social Care Board does not currently routinely commission bariatric surgery, including gastric band surgery. However, if a patient's consultant considers there is a clinical need for a patient to undergo gastric band surgery, they can make an Individual Funding Request (IFR) to the Health and Social Care Board requesting that the patient receives the treatment. Approval is generally only granted by the Board where the consultant can demonstrate that there are exceptional circumstances applying to the individual patient.

Where the Health and Social Care Board approves an IFR for gastric band surgery, the procedure is carried out in Great Britain. The Board will meet the costs associated with the referral in such cases, including the patient's travel costs.

Business Services Transformation Programme

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has met with MLAs to discuss the Business Services Transformation Programme.
(AQW 6489/11-15)

Mr Poots: The latest phase of the Business Services Transformation Programme concerns the model and location of shared support services, public consultation on which began on 7 December and runs until 29 February. The consultation process affords full opportunity for views to be expressed and information obtained. Apart from inviting responses to the detailed consultation document itself, it includes public meetings in each of the five HSC Trust areas. Everyone is free to attend, but the local MLAs are among those specifically invited to do so. I am happy for officials to brief those MLAs who specifically request such briefing, and have arranged for officials to brief the Health, Social Services & Public Safety Committee on the matter.

In the circumstances outlined above, I have felt it inappropriate to engage in separate dialogue while the formal consultation is running its course. I shall make my decisions on HSC shared services in light of the views expressed in the consultation by those affected and those with an interest in the matter.

Consultants

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 3346/11-15, to detail the type of work undertaken by consultants employed by the (i) South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust; and (ii) Southern Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 6560/11-15)

Mr Poots: Consultants in the Southern and South Eastern Trusts provide services across a wide range of specialties. The consultant contract provides an effective system of planning and timetabling consultants' duties and activities and enables employers to manage consultants' time in ways that best meet local service needs and priorities. For consultants, this means greater transparency about the commitments expected of them by their employers and greater clarity over the support that they need from employers to make the maximum effective contribution to improving patient services.

The Contract sets out the contractual and consequential services that a consultant is expected to carry out including Direct Clinical Care; Supporting Professional Activities including participation in training and formal teaching of other staff, clinical management and local clinical governance activities, etc; Additional HSC Responsibilities including managerial and teaching roles e.g. undergraduate or postgraduate dean; External Duties such as undertaking work for the Royal Colleges or General Medical Council etc; and Emergency Work and fee paying services (other than private practice).

Reparative/Conversion Therapy

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) whether medical research has been carried out to show that reparative/conversion therapy works; and (ii) whether reparative/conversion therapy has been used or prescribed by the Health Service, and if so, to provide details.
(AQW 6567/11-15)

Mr Poots: There has been no medical research in Northern Ireland within the Health Service into reparative/conversion therapy. Statutory Services within the HPSS have not used or prescribed reparative/conversion therapy.

Child Internet Safety

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the strategic development within his Department on child internet safety.
(AQW 6613/11-15)

Mr Poots: Ensuring that children are kept safe on the Internet requires cross-Departmental support. As a consequence, my Department works with relevant Departments and other Agencies as part of the Safeguarding sub-group of the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People which, among other issues, promotes child Internet safety.

Officials from my Department represent Northern Ireland on the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) and the Executive Board. UKCCIS is currently finalising industry good practice guidance in relation to social networking, search technology, instant messaging and interactive services for children.

To coincide with Safer Internet Day on 7 February 2012, my Department, in co-operation with the UK Safer Internet Centre, will raise awareness of this year's key message to encourage users young and old to "discover the digital world together safely".

My Department is preparing to establish the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) this year. The SBNI will play a key role in setting the strategic direction for child safeguarding in Northern Ireland. Given the continuously evolving challenges to the safety of children generated by the Internet, it is my expectation that child Internet safety will be central to SBNI strategy.

Finally, under the auspices of the North South Ministerial Council, my Department is part of a cross-border group of officials, who have co-operated on a range of child protection matters, including internet safety. Officials routinely keep each other appraised of developments in Internet safety on both sides of the border.

Rare Diseases: Public Consultation on UK Plan

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the public consultation on the UK Plan for Rare Diseases will be launched in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 6654/11-15)

Mr Poots: Development of the UK Plan for Rare Diseases is being lead by Department of Health, London in consultation with the devolved administrations.

I have been advised that work is progressing on refining the consultation and finalising questions. No decisions have been taken about when the consultation will be launched.

Care Matters in Northern Ireland Strategy

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on his Department's Care Matters in Northern Ireland Strategy.
(AQW 6660/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Care Matters Strategy is cross-departmental and, as such, was endorsed by the Northern Ireland Executive in 2009. My Department continues to support a number of initiatives developed under the Strategy. A review exercise, led by my Department, is currently underway to assess the extent to which recommendations made under Care Matters have been acted upon and to identify any action outstanding.

Families Matter Strategy

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on his Department's Families Matter Strategy.
(AQW 6666/11-15)

Mr Poots: Families Matter sets out my Department's vision for improving support and services for families and children.

My Department is currently gathering information for the 2010/11 monitoring report on the Families Matter Implementation Plan 2009/11.

The information provided by the monitoring report will assist in the drafting of an evaluation report on the implementation of Families Matter for the period 2009 -2011. This will inform a future review and/or future implementation plan for the strategy.

Health and Social Care Mental Health and Learning Disability Task Force

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the work of the Health and Social Care Mental Health and Learning Disability Task Force.
(AQW 6668/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Task Force has made a significant contribution to the reform and modernisation of mental health and learning disability services in line with the Bamford Action Plan 2009-2011. Over 60% of actions in the plan fell to my Department or HSC bodies to take forward. The Task Force has led or contributed to much of the work involved.

An evaluation of the 2009-2011 Action Plan indicates that, overall, 80% of actions committed to were achieved. I hope to publish this evaluation in due course.

Work is progressing on the development of the Bamford Action Plan 2012-2015. The Bamford Task Force will be responsible for the delivery of HSC actions in the 2012-2015 Plan and are contributing fully to the Plan's development.

Pregnancy

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety at what stage of a pregnancy should a women be seen by a clinician.
(AQW 6670/11-15)

Mr Poots: The care of each pregnant woman will depend on her individual needs. Ideally women should see a clinician as soon as they are planning a pregnancy. All women should make contact with their GP or midwife as soon as they know they are pregnant so that they can receive early advice and assessment and a discussion about which clinicians will be most appropriate to provide their care during pregnancy. The most appropriate clinician for each contact will depend on the woman's individual needs and risks, and may be their midwife, obstetrician or GP.

In addition to this early contact, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) recommend that women with a straightforward pregnancy are seen at around 10 weeks for assessment of their needs and for antenatal screening, and around 20 weeks for an anomaly scan. They should have regular contact with an appropriate clinician at 16, 28, 34, 36, 38, 41 and 42 weeks for all women and additional assessments at 31 and 40 weeks for women in their first pregnancy.

Women who have a multiple pregnancy, existing medical conditions, those who develop complications during pregnancy or have other added needs, may be seen more often.

Hospital Appointments: Cost of Non-attendance

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number; and (ii) the cost, of missed hospital appointments in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6672/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(i) The number of hospital appointments missed in each of the last three years is outlined in the table below. These figures represent the number of outpatient appointments where a patient did not attend (DNA) and failed to give advance warning to the hospital.

When assessing the level of missed appointments, it is more appropriate to consider these in the context of the total number of outpatient attendances, each year, in order to provide a more comparative trend analysis. This involves the calculation of a standardised measure of missed appointments, which is called a DNA rate. DNA rates for each of the last three years are also presented in the table below.

Year	Number of missed hospital appointments (DNAs)	Missed appointment (DNA) rate1
2008/09	184,792	10.8
2009/10	172,877	10.3
2010/11	171,740	10.3

Source: Departmental Quarterly Outpatient Activity Return (Part 1)

1 The DNA rate is calculated as follows: (Number of missed appointments/(Number of outpatient attendances + Number of missed appointments))*100

(ii) Given that hospitals over book appointments in the knowledge that some patients will not attend, it is not possible to provide an accurate estimate of the cost of missed hospital appointments.

Carers for Relatives in the Community

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to acknowledge the role of those who care for relatives in the community.
(AQW 6676/11-15)

Mr Poots: Carers are a vital part of my Department's vision of providing support for people to live more independent lives. The contribution that carers make towards helping people to remain in their own homes and to live independently cannot be overstated.

I will continue to demonstrate my support for, and recognition of, the important role of carers by ensuring that the needs and rights of carers remain at the centre of my Department's policies. I believe that the work of carers is at the core of strong

families and unified communities and continue to demonstrate my support for carers by my ongoing attendance and participation at carer celebration and recognition events.

In addition my Department provides annual core funding to Carers NI, the Northern Ireland branch of Carers UK, a membership organisation of carers involved in campaigning for carers; providing information and advice to carers about their rights; carrying out research; mobilising supporters; and acting against discrimination.

Glanree House, Newry

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that Glanree House, Newry is full to and has a waiting list, whether there are any plans for additional supported living facilities in the Newry area in the next five years.
(AQW 6719/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is for Trusts to plan and deliver services to its own populations taking account of assessment of individual need, the availability of resources and other priority demands for services. I am advised by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust that it is not currently developing plans for additional supported living facilities within the Newry and Mourne locality.

Hydebank Wood: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety which statutory body is responsible for the budget for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services for 15-17 year olds in Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre.
(AQW 6731/11-15)

Mr Poots: I refer the member to the answers I provided to AQWs 5785/11-15 and 5697/11-15.

Hydebank Wood: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety which statutory body is responsible for the commissioning of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services for 15-17 year olds in Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre.
(AQW 6732/11-15)

Mr Poots: I refer the member to the answers I provided to AQWs 5785/11-15 and 5697/11-15.

Grovetree House, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his plans for Grovetree House in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust area, following the 'Excellence and Choice' document published in 2009.
(AQW 6745/11-15)

Mr Poots: In 2009 the residents of Grovetree House were given an undertaking that the home would remain open for as long as they needed it. This position has not changed and Trust officials have advised that there are no plans to close Grovetree House.

At present Grovetree House has nine permanent residents and 15 intermediate care beds, and continues to facilitate respite care. The Trust, in the interests of efficiency, proposes to centralise the location of intermediate care beds at Chestnut Grove residential home on the Somerton Road, Belfast. . Meetings have been held with residents, relatives, staff, trade unions and local political representatives to apprise them of the plans.

Medical Appointments: SMS Reminder Scheme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on plans to introduce an SMS based appointment reminder system in the Health Service.
(AQW 6761/11-15)

Mr Poots: At present HSC Trusts do not routinely telephone to remind patients of an appointment. However I am advised that each Trust is currently considering the potential value of an SMS based appointment reminder system. Some have already introduced a text reminder system for specific areas and are evaluating the impact of this prior to making further decisions on a possible wider application.

Older People's Health and Well-being and the Dementia Strategy

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on (i) the service framework for older people's health and well being; and (ii) the Dementia Strategy.
(AQW 6772/11-15)

Mr Poots: Following detailed evidence gathering and analysis over the last year, a project team comprised of a wide range of stakeholders, including patient and carer representatives, has completed a draft of the Older People's Service Framework which was submitted to my Department on 6th January 2012. This will now be subject to quality assurance by senior policy and professional officials before being published for public consultation in the next few months.

I made a statement to the Assembly on 8 November 2011 announcing the publication of the Dementia Strategy which aims to improve the services provided to people living with dementia and their carers. The Strategy contains an action plan with timescales and details the lead agency responsible for delivery of each action.

The Strategy also tasked the HSC Board and Public Health Agency with establishing and jointly leading a regional group to oversee implementation of the Dementia Strategy and its actions. Work is progressing on establishing this group, which will report to my Department on progress against the actions on a 6-monthly basis.

Physical and Sensory Disability Strategy

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the Physical and Sensory Disability Strategy.
(AQW 6775/11-15)

Mr Poots: Publication of the Physical and Sensory Disability Strategy was approved by the NI Executive on 15 December 2011. It is my intention to officially launch the Strategy on 22 February 2012.

Dalriada Hospital, Ballycastle

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the services provided at Dalriada Hospital, Ballycastle.
(AQW 6776/11-15)

Mr Poots: The delivery of services at the Dalriada Hospital is a matter for the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. I am advised that there are 32 inpatient beds available in the hospital which accommodate a number of patients including those requiring rehabilitation following fracture/orthopaedic surgery, Multiple Sclerosis respite service users, GP admissions and, if required, 2 beds can be utilised for palliative care.

The Northern Trust has been reviewing its complement of intermediate beds across the Trust area and as a result of this, new referral mechanisms are being developed. The Trust is also exploring ways of facilitating safe admissions at weekends and during bank holidays.

Glanree House, Newry

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are on the waiting list for supported living accommodation at Glanree House, Newry.
(AQW 6778/11-15)

Mr Poots: This information is not available centrally, and the Southern Trust's response to my Department's request for relevant figures is detailed below for your information.

There is no waiting list in operation for Glanree House. For a person to be considered for supported living accommodation, they must be on the Common Housing Selection Scheme list, which is held by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE).

When a vacancy comes up within any supported living scheme, the Common Housing Selection Scheme list is scrutinised to identify the most appropriate person for that placement. As part of this screening process, compatibility issues with existing residents are a high priority. NIHE always seek our guidance and recommendations when considering the filling of a vacant place.

There are a number of people in all localities that would benefit from supported living, and they are currently on the Common Housing Selection Scheme list. Glanree and all other supported living schemes are seen as a home for life, and a vacancy would only become available upon the death of a resident, or if a resident moves into another tenancy.

Hydebank Wood: Child Protection Register

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many 15-17 year olds in Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre are on the Child Protection Register.
(AQW 6779/11-15)

Mr Poots: This information is not available centrally, and on request the Probation Board for Northern Ireland advised my Department that there are no 15-17 year olds in Hydebank Wood Young Offenders Centre on the Child Protection Register.

Tristel Product

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) which Health and Social Care Trusts currently use the Tristel product; (ii) which Trusts have used it in the past and for how long; and (iii) the reasons why Trusts stopped using Tristel.
(AQW 6801/11-15)

Mr Poots: Tristel has a suite of products. Tristel Duo and Tristel Foam are used in some Trusts for decontaminating instruments and specialist equipment. The table below indicates Tristel's usage as a general cleaning agent.

Trust	Currently use Tristel?	Has the Trust used it in the past and for how long?	Reason for stopping use of Tristel
Belfast HSCT	No	Never used	N/A
Northern HSCT	No	Feb 2008 – Oct 2009	Fewer health and safety concerns for staff by using an alternative product.
South Eastern HSCT	No	Never used	N/A
Southern HSCT	No	Never used	N/A
Western HSCT	No	Never used	N/A

Adoption

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children have been adopted in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6807/11-15)

Mr Poots: The figures requested are not available centrally.

The nearest available figures are produced annually by the Northern Ireland Guardian ad Litem Agency in their Annual Report, in which they record the number of Adoption Orders granted by courts in Northern Ireland between 1st April and 31st March. These figures are detailed in Table 1 below for your information.

Table 1 Adoption Orders Granted in Northern Ireland (2009 – 2011)

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
No. of Adoption Orders Granted	102	91	98

Source: NIGALA Annual Reports

Note: These figures have not been validated by DHSSPS. Adoption Orders include: Adoption Placement, Adoption Step Parent, Adoption Abroad, Adoption Relative & Inter Country Adoption.

Fostering

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children have been fostered in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6808/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not centrally available, and could only be provided at disproportionate costs.

The nearest figures available to those requested, relate to the number of looked after children in foster care placements at 31 March in each of the last three years. These are detailed in Table 1 below for your information.

Table 1 Looked After Children in Foster Care Placements at 31 March (2009 – 2011)

	2009	2010	2011
No. of Children in Foster Care	1,607	1,687	1,862

Source: Children Order Return LA2 (2009, 2010) & Health and Social Care Board Corporate Parenting Returns (2011). Excludes private fostering arrangements.

Adoption: Outside the UK

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children have been adopted from outside the UK, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6809/11-15)

Mr Poots: Table 1 below details the numbers of children adopted from outside the United Kingdom, by Health and Social Care Trust for the last three years for which data are available.

Table 1

Number of children from countries outside the United Kingdom adopted by parents or families in Northern Ireland during the years from 2008/09 to 2010/111 by HSC Trust

HSC Trust	2008/093	2009/102	2010/112
Belfast	-	-	-
Northern	-	-	-
South Eastern	-	-	-
Southern	-	-	9
Western	-	-	-
Northern Ireland	**23**	**8**	**13**

1 Inter-country adoption figures are not available centrally, and for 2008/09 were obtained from regional figures provided in reply to Assembly Question AQW 3650/10, and from the HSC Board for 2009/10 and 2010/11. Figures detailed in Table 1 have not been validated by the DHSSPS.

2 Some HSC Trusts figures have been suppressed due to small numbers and to avoid personal disclosure.

3 Excludes children adopted from the Republic of Ireland.

Information detailing the countries from which children have been adopted from outside the United Kingdom in each of the last three years is not available centrally, and could only be provided at disproportion costs. However, similar information was provided in reply to AQW 3650/10, which is detailed in Table 2 below for your information.

Table 2

Number of children from countries outside the United Kingdom or Ireland adopted by parents or families in Northern Ireland for the five year period from 2004/05 to 2008/09 by Country of Origin

Country of Origin	Children Adopted 2004/05-2008/09
Thailand	28
China	13
Russia	11
Guatemala	6
Other Countries	12
Total	**70**

Note: The five year period refers to 1 April 2004 to 31 March 2009. Children refer to those younger than 18 years. 'Other Countries' includes, Brazil, Bulgaria Mexico, Philippines, Cambodia, Latvia, Kosovo, and Belarus. The information reported in Table 2 was provided by Health and Social Care Trusts and has not been validated by the DHSSPS.

Adoption: From other Countries

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the countries from which children have been adopted in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6810/11-15)

Mr Poots: Table 1 below details the numbers of children adopted from outside the United Kingdom, by Health and Social Care Trust for the last three years for which data are available.

Table 1

Number of children from countries outside the United Kingdom adopted by parents or families in Northern Ireland during the years from 2008/09 to 2010/111 by HSC Trust

HSC Trust	2008/093	2009/102	2010/112
Belfast	-	-	-
Northern	-	-	-
South Eastern	-	-	-

HSC Trust	2008/093	2009/102	2010/112
Southern	-	-	9
Western	-	-	-
Northern Ireland	**23**	**8**	**13**

1 Inter-country adoption figures are not available centrally, and for 2008/09 were obtained from regional figures provided in reply to Assembly Question AQW 3650/10, and from the HSC Board for 2009/10 and 2010/11. Figures detailed in Table 1 have not been validated by the DHSSPS.

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Number of children from countries outside the United Kingdom or Ireland adopted by parents or families in Northern Ireland for the five year period from 2004/05 to 2008/09 by Country of Origin

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Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been diagnosed with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis in each of the last five years.
(AQW 6855/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information is not available on the number of people that have been diagnosed with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis in each of the last five years, however information is available on the number of admissions to HSC Hospitals in Northern Ireland where a diagnosis of Myalgic Encephalomyelitis was recorded.

Year	Admissions
2006/07	49
2007/08	37
2008/09	76
2009/10	79
2010/11	113

Source: Hospital Inpatient System

Deaths and discharges are used as an approximation of admissions. It should be noted that these figures do not represent individuals as a person may be admitted to hospital more than once in a year or across a number of years.

Wind Turbines

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been treated for an illness caused by being, or living, close to a wind turbine in each of the last five years.
(AQW 6857/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information is not available on the number of people who have been treated for an illness caused by being, or living, close to a wind turbine in each of the last five years.

Intensive Care Ventilators

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 4461/11-15, in relation to the late payment by Maquet Limited on the buy back of equipment, to detail any financial recovery by his Department, following the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998, as extended by the Late Payment of Commercial Debts Regulations 2002.
(AQW 6873/11-15)

Mr Poots: In relation to the late payment by Maquet Limited on the buyback of equipment, there was no financial recovery by the either the Department or Belfast HSC Trust under the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998, as extended by the Late Payment of Commercial Debts Regulations 2002.

Intensive Care Ventilators

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 4461/11-15, why, in the purchase of the 100 ventilators there was a buy-back arrangement for only 10 ventilators, when is it anticipated that the surplus ventilators will be put to use.
(AQW 6874/11-15)

Mr Poots: Pursuant to AQW 4461/11-15, the buy-back option was based on planning assumptions in place at that time for response to the H1N1 pandemic. This option was negotiated to allow flexibility in planning and response and to inform decisions about future critical care capacity requirements in Northern Ireland.

Even though the buy-back option was exercised, a further 11 paediatric intensive care ventilators remain available in the system for use by Trusts to enable them to meet any future surge demands. These ventilators can also be used to expand adult critical care capacity if needed.

Nazareth House, Derry

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the concerns of elderly residents, and their families, and in the event of Nazareth House, Derry, failing to meet Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority standards, to detail (i) to where residents will be moved; (ii) when they will be moved; and (iii) when they will be informed of any such move.
(AQW 6959/11-15)

Mr Poots: Following the issuing of a Failure to Comply notice by the Regional Quality Improvement Authority in respect of the level of care being provided in Nazareth House Residential Home, the Western Health & Social Care Trust have taken a number of steps to support the management of the home to respond to, and address, the issues identified by RQIA by the required deadline of 10th February.

A review and full assessment of residents' needs is currently under way, and priority will be given to the placement of those residents who needs can only be met in a nursing home. The placement of any resident who is found to be in need of nursing care will take place only after consultation with the individual and their families.

Department of Justice

Maghaberry Prison: Attempted Escape from Custody

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the circumstances surrounding the recent attempt(s) by a prisoner in Maghaberry Prison to escape from custody whilst being taken for an external hospital appointment; (ii) whether staff were injured, including how many and to what degree; (iii) whether he will order an investigation into this matter; and (iv) whether he will make a statement on this matter to the Assembly.
(AQW 6103/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): An attempted escape occurred on 3 January 2012 whilst a prisoner was under escort by Prisoner Escorting and Court Custody Service staff at Belfast City Hospital. The circumstances surrounding the attempted escape are currently subject to a full investigation by a senior Governor from Prison Service Headquarters. I am assured that this investigation is nearing conclusion. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on the circumstances until the investigation is completed.

I can confirm that three staff have been suspended from duty under the Code of Conduct and Discipline and that, post incident, one staff member reported injuries to his hand and received medical treatment.

Prisoners: Leave over Christmas

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in respect of prisoners who were granted leave for Christmas (i) how many did not return to custody on the stipulated date; (ii) how many did not abide by the terms of their release without incident; and (iii) how many had to be returned to prison prior to their stipulated date and for what reason(s).
(AQW 6105/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) Of the prisoners who were granted Christmas leave, one young offender and two prisoners failed to return on the stipulated date. Two returned one day late and one three days late.

(ii) Four prisoners failed to abide by their home leave conditions.

(iii) Of these four, three were returned to custody prior to their stipulated date.

They were returned for the following reasons:-

- Breach of curfew and missing PBNI appointment;
- Consuming alcohol; and
- Discovered in possession of alcohol at his hostel.

Obstructing Lawful Activity in a Public Place

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, of the 26 people convicted of obstructing lawful activity in a public place, and additional offences, on 12 July 2010; (i) how many were granted Legal Aid; (ii) the total cost of the Legal Aid; (iii) how many legal firms were instructed; and (iv) in how many cases counsel was employed.
(AQW 6106/11-15)

Mr Ford: There were a total of 27 defendants who were granted legal aid. Of these, 26 were convicted of charges relating to this incident. One defendant was not convicted, the charges having been dismissed.

Nine firms of solicitors represented the defendants. Eleven defendants were granted legal aid to cover representation of junior counsel. No fees have been paid in respect of counsel to date.

Payment has issued for advice given under both the Green Form Scheme and PACE, (the Police and Criminal Evidence Act), in the sum of £807.49 (inc VAT of £128.49).

To date, payment has issued for claims in relation to only two of the defendants in respect of solicitors' fees in the sum of £2842.46 (inc VAT of £464.58).

It is estimated that further fees for proceedings in the Magistrates' Court are likely to amount to approximately £23,000.

Prisoner Assessment Unit

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the investigation into the Prisoner Assessment Unit's failings and the concerns which led to its closure, whether the investigation has concluded, and if so, when the report will be published.
(AQW 6107/11-15)

Mr Ford: The investigation into the Prisoner Assessment Unit (PAU) has been concluded and the disciplinary recommendations arising from the investigation have been implemented. The remaining recommendations relate to the running of the PAU and as yet no decision has been taken on the future of the unit. No date has yet been fixed for publication of the report.

Pearse Jordan: Coroner's Inquest

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost, to date, of the coroner's inquest into the death of Pearse Jordan.
(AQW 6126/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below sets out the identifiable costs to date and includes legal aid costs and other legal expenses incurred for the various challenges and satellite litigation associated with this case.

The court (judiciary, staff and overhead) costs associated with this case are not known and to retrieve them would require a manual trawl of records at disproportionate cost.

Cost Type	**Amount**
Legal and other costs incurred by the Coroner's Office	£92,740.84
Legal challenges and other satellite litigation – Legal Costs*	£232,632.48
Legal Aid Costs*	£304,724.00
Total	**£630,097.32**

* Relates to actual payments made to date, full and final settlement of these costs is still under consideration.

Prison: Alternatives

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to detail the prison diversionary projects his Department sponsors which (i) involve charities or constituted groups; and (ii) do not involve charities or constituted groups.
(AQW 6163/11-15)

Mr Ford: The selection of the appropriate sentence in individual cases, taking into account all relevant considerations, is quite rightly, an independent matter for the judiciary. Whilst custody should be the ultimate sanction for those who commit serious offences, imprisonment needs to be a last resort and to be used with restraint. For many offenders, supervision in the community may be the most appropriate and effective response.

The importance of redirecting people from offending behaviour is widely recognised and my Department and its agencies, in particular the Probation Board, PSNI and the Youth Justice Agency, support many preventative and diversionary projects to redirect offenders away from more serious offending behaviour. It is important for relevant agencies, including those based in the community, to work together to connect those who have offended into the appropriate mainstream and specialist provision that can help them.

Two projects that directly divert people from prison are electronic monitoring and supervised activity orders.

Since April 2009 courts have had the ability to impose a curfew with an electronic monitoring requirement. This has enabled judges to impose the requirement that the suspect wear an electronic tag and be subject to a curfew of up to 12 hours per day as a condition of bail in circumstances where they might otherwise have considered custodial remand to be the only suitable alternative. The monitoring services are provided to my Department under tendered contract by a private sector contractor.

My Department is currently conducting a pilot programme for Supervised Activity Orders which provide Courts with an alternative to the current automatic default to imprisonment for those defaulting on court imposed fines. The pilot is being managed by Probation Board for Northern Ireland and is operating in the Newry Court district.

My Department sponsors the Inspire Women's Project which delivers an enhanced range of women-specific services for women on statutory supervision orders and women whose court cases have been adjourned for Pre-Sentence Reports. This project is directly contributing to reducing women's offending through targeted community-based interventions. A key element of this project is its partnership arrangements involving Probation, NIACRO and the Women's Support Network. This links women offenders attending Inspire into the services of over 50 community-based women's centres, women's projects and so on across Northern Ireland, providing a diverse range of services that support women in the resettlement process.

The Department also directly sponsors NIACRO and Extern which deliver a wide range of diversionary programmes, with offenders in custody and in the community to reduce re-offending and help them to deal with problems that have contributed to their offending. Both bodies work in collaboration with NIPS, PBNI and the Youth Justice Agency, as well as other government departments and Agencies.

Prison: Alternatives

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice (i) what percentage of his Department's budget is allocated to preventative or diversionary alternatives to prison; and (ii) how much his Department has spent on preventative or diversionary alternatives to prison in each of the last five years.
(AQW 6165/11-15)

Mr Ford: £15.1m or 1.1% of the total Department of Justice consolidated operating cost was spent on preventative or diversionary alternatives to prison in 2010/11. This excludes the wide range of community based preventative and diversionary programmes which are directed at reducing offending but are not a direct alternative to prison. It also excludes the preventative and diversionary work of the Youth Justice Agency.

The table below gives a breakdown of the amounts spent on preventative or diversionary alternatives to prison in each of the past 5 years:-

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Probation Board for Northern Ireland	£15.94m	£15.91m	£16.74m	£18.89m	£13.12m#
**Includes Community development funding of:*	*£1.21m*	*£1.32m*	*£1.17m*	*£1.26m*	*£1.32m*
Extern (core funding)	£0.39m	£0.33m	£0.34m	£0.34m	£0.35m
NIACRO (core funding)	£0.47m	£0.47m	£0.48m	£0.50m	£0.50m
Electronic Monitoring				£0.03m	£1.17m
Total	**£16.80m**	**£16.71m**	**£17.56m**	**£19.76m**	**£15.14m**

The net expenditure for Probation Board for Northern Ireland in 2010/11 includes a pension credit which is why it is lower than in previous years

Prison: Alternatives

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what new initiatives, in relation to diversionary activities from prison, his Department has supported in the last year.
(AQW 6167/11-15)

Mr Ford: The department is currently conducting a pilot programme for Supervised Activity Orders which provide Courts with an alternative to the current automatic default to imprisonment for those defaulting on court imposed fines. The pilot it being managed by Probation Board for Northern Ireland and is operating in the Newry Court District.

Prison Custody Officers

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of Prison Custody Officers employed, broken down by prison, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 6174/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below shows the number of Prisoner Custody Officers and Senior Prisoner Custody Officers employed in the Prisoner Escorting and Court Custody Service (PECCS) since 1 April 2007.

	01.04.07	**01.04.08**	**01.04.09**	**01.04.10**	**01.04.11**
SPCO	7	6	15	15	17
PCO	93	143	174	174	159
Total	**100**	**149**	**189**	**189**	**176**

PECCS staff are allocated from a central source to service the transportation of prisoners to and from the three establishments and the management of prisoners attending court.

Prisoner Escorting and Court Custody Service

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total number of staff employed by the Prisoner Escorting and Court Custody Service in each of the last five years.
(AQW 6175/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below sets out the total number of staff employed by the Prisoner Escorting and Court Custody Service in each of the last five years.

Date	**01.04.07**	**01.04.08**	**01.04.09**	**01.04.10**	**01.04.11**
Total Staff	**186**	**190**	**199**	**200**	**187**

Maghaberry Prison: 22 December 2011 Event

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline the purpose of the Prison Service pre-Christmas event on 22 December 2011 which was held at Maghaberry Prison; and to detail (i) the cost of the event; (ii) the budget from which the cost was met; and (iii) the number of guests who were (a) invited; and (b) attended.
(AQW 6185/11-15)

Mr Ford: Archbishop Harper and Cardinal Brady visited Maghaberry Prison on 22 December 2011. Their request to visit was made directly to NIPS Headquarters with the purpose of seeing the work of the prison Chaplaincy service at first hand as well as other important services to prisoners. In order to provide the visitors with an opportunity to meet as many functional managers and staff as possible a lunchtime event was organised. Prison chaplains, representatives from the Independent Monitoring Board and managers and staff from key functional areas such as Offender Management, Healthcare and Prisoner Safety and Support were invited to attend.

(i) The total cost of catering for the event was £235.

(ii) The cost for catering was paid for from the Maghaberry Governor's budget

(iii) (a)Forty participants were invited to attend.

(b) All those invited attended.

Barry Johnston

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how the situation arose whereby Barry Johnston was able to rape an older person in Ballymena two days after serving a sentence for breaching a Sex Offenders Prevention Order, despite being monitored by a number of agencies; and why the community was not alerted to the presence of a sex offender in the area and the potential risk that he posed.
(AQW 6188/11-15)

Mr Ford: Barry Johnston was released from prison at the end of his sentence. A sexual offences prevention order was made by the court for the purpose of protecting the public from serious sexual harm. Despite this, the offender chose to reoffend. A serious case review by an independent person concluded that the agencies had fully discharged their responsibilities under the PPANI arrangements. An executive summary of this report has been published on the PPANI website.

Routine public disclosure of information about offenders is unlawful under current Data Protection legislation and is only undertaken when it is the combined view of the agencies that evidence suggests there is a need to disclose an offender's identity in order to protect the public.

Courthouses: Closure

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice (i) for a breakdown of (a) the projected operating costs; and (b) the necessary capital spend in respect of each of the five courthouses which are targeted for closure; (ii) to detail the estimated annual maintenance and other costs associated with the upkeep of the courthouses if they are not used until they are sold; (iii) when it is anticipated that the sales would take place; and (iv) the anticipated level of receipt from the sales.
(AQW 6191/11-15)

Mr Ford: The projected annual operating cost of each Hearing Centre, based on the current opening schedule, is set out in Table 1 below. These costs include utility charges, premises related costs, service charges and general administrative costs (excluding salaries):

Table 1 – Projected Operating Costs

Hearing Centre	Projected Annual Operating Cost
Larne	£99,000
Bangor	£143,000
Strabane	£208,000
Limavady	£97,000
Magherafelt	£125,000

The estimated capital expenditure required to ensure each of the five Hearing Centres is fit for purpose in future years is set out in Table 2 below:

Table 2 – Estimated Capital Expenditure

Hearing Centre	DDA Expenditure	Condition Survey	Total
Larne	£225,000	£325,000	£550,000
Bangor	£91,000	£453,000	£544,000
Strabane	£47,500	£396,000	£443,500
Limavady	£20,500	£308,000	£328,500
Magherafelt	£65,000	£1,076,000	£1,141,000
Total	**£449,000**	**£2,558,000**	**£3,007,000**

Following any decision to close a Hearing Centre a reduced planned maintenance programme would be established. Each building would be surveyed prior to closure to agree the necessary maintenance works and the associated cost. Aside from these planned maintenance works, any budget allocation would also include on-going premises costs such as rates charges, utilities and minor reactive maintenance works. Table 3 sets out these estimated premises costs for each Hearing Centre.

Table 3 – Estimated Annual Premises Costs Following Closure

Hearing Centre	Estimated Annual Premises Costs
Larne	£3,700
Bangor	£5,500
Strabane	£9,500
Limavady	£3,300
Magherafelt	£7,300

It is recognised that there may be a need for further expenditure to respond to particular maintenance issues that may arise.

My Department has no plans to make alternative use of the Hearing Centres should they be permanently closed. In the first instance each venue would be offered to other Departments to utilise and, if not required, may be placed on the open market. Approval for the sale of any of the Hearing Centres would be subject to a business case approved by the Department of Finance & Personnel and would reflect the market price at that time.

Public Defence Service

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice what consideration he has given to the establishment of a public defence service in order to reduce the legal aid bill.
(AQW 6195/11-15)

Mr Ford: As part of the Access to Justice Review initiated by me in September 2010, consideration was given to the establishment of a public defence service in Northern Ireland. That Review concluded that there are particular benefits for this jurisdiction in relying on criminal defence services provided by the independent private sector legal profession with both real and perceived independence from the state. However, the Review did not rule out the possibility of establishing a public defence service at some point in the future as a means of ensuring the supply of criminal legal services. With regard to reducing legal aid costs, the Review Team concluded that establishing a public defence service capable of meeting our human rights obligations may lead to increased cost to the legal aid fund.

Prison: Alternatives

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to outline the readiness of his Department to support new projects that are aimed at providing an alternative to prison.
(AQW 6213/11-15)

Mr Ford: I refer the Member to the reply I gave to AQW/6164/11-15 and AQW/6166/11-15.

Injury on Duty Appeals

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how do rulings, that indicate that Injury on Duty appeals for former police officers who are over the age of 65 are automatically valued at 0 percent, comply with police regulations.
(AQW 6217/11-15)

Mr Ford: Regulation 6(5) of The PSNI and PSNI Reserve (Injury Benefit) Regulations 2006 refers to the degree of a person's disablement as being determined by reference to the degree to which earning capacity has been affected as a result of injury. The entitlement to awards is considered in light of the state retirement age, at which an individual's anticipated earning capacity may expect to be minimised. An award is still made to those placed in Band 1, at 0%, commensurate with the degree to which earning capacity has been affected.

Injury on Duty Appeals

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what legal advice has been given, or sought, on the rulings that Injury on Duty appeals for former police officers who are over the age of 65 should be valued at 0 percent.
(AQW 6218/11-15)

Mr Ford: There have been a number of recent rulings in respect of individual cases of over-65 year olds in England and Wales. I expect that the Home Office will seek legal advice on the impact of these rulings on their guidance before it is finalised and put to the Police Negotiating Board for approval. No such cases have been brought against the guidance in Northern Ireland, but we will seek to reflect the updated guidance in due course in order to ensure parity of treatment as far as is appropriate for Northern Ireland.

Injury on Duty Awards

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what plans his Department has to reconvene the review team on Injury on Duty awards so that it can reconsider the position of appeals from police officers who are over the age of 65.
(AQW 6219/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Terms of Reference of the Review Panel allowed wider issues about the guidance on legislation to be considered. The Review Team took the decision that it would not address issues which were subject to litigation and which had a UK-wide implication. The Review Team submitted its report in September 2010 on that basis and has concluded its work. There are no plans for it to be reconstituted.

Injury on Duty Awards

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice whether Injury on Duty awards are processed in an identical manner across all the police forces in the UK.
(AQW 6220/11-15)

Mr Ford: Home Office Guidance is provided to all the Police Authorities in England and Wales. The Department of Justice has provided guidance to the Northern Ireland Policing Board which reflects that issued by the Home Office but is specifically for Northern Ireland.

These guidance documents are not legally binding. It would therefore be impossible to confirm if the Injury on Duty awards are processed in an identical manner by all the Police Authorities and the Policing Board.

Nor am I, as Minister of Justice in Northern Ireland, accountable for the application of the Injury on Duty scheme in other jurisdictions.

Prisoners: Rehabilitation

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of whether a prisoner, who has served a sentence for a violent crime such as rape, can be classed as rehabilitated, and fit to return to society, if they have refused to engage with counselling or other programmes aimed at addressing offending behaviour and identifying victim awareness.
(AQW 6267/11-15)

Mr Ford: No-one can ever be in a position to state as fact that someone is rehabilitated; rather, the justice system has in place rigorous risk assessment procedures which are intended to identify an individual's criminogenic behaviours. There is also a wide range of interventions which can be delivered to address an individual's offending behaviour.

Those who refuse to engage with counselling or other programmes are provided with one-to-one support, where practical, so as to address their denial. This particularly applies to those in prison custody.

Whether someone chooses to engage constructively with any intervention, including one-to-one counselling, is entirely an individual decision. For those who do not engage, their risk may remain unchanged.

For those sentenced to an indeterminate or public protection sentence, decisions on release rest with the Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland.

Prisoners: Leave over Christmas

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) how many prisoners who were granted leave over the recent Christmas period were sex offenders; (ii) in what category were these prisoners; and (iii) whether their victims were informed of their release.
(AQW 6268/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) Six sex offenders, two of whom are young offenders, were granted leave over the Christmas period.

(ii) Of the six sex offenders; two were Category "B" and four were Category "C".

(iii) Of the six sex offenders released on temporary release three of the victims were registered with the Prisoner Release Victim Information (Northern Ireland) Scheme 2003. In two cases the victims opted to receive details of temporary release under the scheme and were advised that a period of release had been granted.

Sex Offenders

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Justice to detail the process by which a local community is alerted to the presence of a sex offender in the area; and what notification is provided of the degree of risk posed by the individual.
(AQW 6308/11-15)

Mr Ford: Agencies can disclose information about offenders in a controlled way when, on the basis of evidence and, as part of the risk management process, it is considered necessary to provide better protection to an individual, a community or the public in general. Each case is considered on its own merits. Detail of the disclosure process is given in the PPANI Manual of Practice published on the PPANI website.

Legal Aid: Budget

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how much has been paid from the legal aid budget on the travel or mileage costs of legal representatives in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6318/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below sets out legal aid expenditure on travel and mileage paid to legal representatives in the last three financial years.

The figures include expenditure for both solicitors and counsel across all legal aid schemes - Civil, Criminal, Children Order, Assistance by Way of Representation and Legal Advice and Assistance.

Information regarding total expenditure on air travel and accommodation is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Travel Time	£1.89m	£1.76m	£2.12m
Mileage	£1.10m	£0.98m	£1.17m

Hospitality: Spend

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice what has been the total spend on hospitality by his Department in each year since its establishment.
(AQW 6361/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice came into existence on 12th April 2010.

Expenditure on hospitality for the 2010/11 financial year by the Department, excluding agencies and non departmental public bodies, was £37,666.40.

Prisoners: Leave over Christmas

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) how many of the prisoners who were granted leave over the Christmas period are serving sentences for (a) murder; (b) manslaughter and (c) attempted murder; and (ii) whether the victim(s) were informed of their temporary release.
(AQW 6372/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) (a) 26 of the prisoners who were granted home leave over the Christmas period are serving a sentence for murder

(b) Four of the prisoners who were granted home leave over the Christmas period are serving a sentence for manslaughter.

(c) One prisoner who was granted home leave over the Christmas period is serving a sentence for attempted murder.

(ii) In each case, where victims' family members are registered with the Prisoner Release Victim Information (Northern Ireland) Scheme 2003 (PRVIS) and where they have opted to receive details of temporary release, each registered person was advised in advance that the prisoner had been granted a period of leave over Christmas 2011.

Enniskillen Courthouse: Double Yellow Lines

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the double yellow lines outside Enniskillen Court House (i) on what recommendation the lines were applied; (ii) what prior consultation took place and with whom; (iii) when the lines were raised as a concern and by whom; and (iv) when the decision was taken to (a) apply the lines; and (b) remove the lines.
(AQW 6390/11-15)

Mr Ford: Double yellow lines were introduced outside and opposite Enniskillen Courthouse on the advice of the Centre for Protection of the National Infrastructure (CPNI) as part of a number of measures to enhance the physical security of the courthouse.

Consultation took place with a Roads Service official and local traders. This included visits by an NICTS official to business premises in East Bridge Street in April 2011. Letters were also issued to business owners explaining the need to introduce parking restrictions in East Bridge Street.

In late September 2011 concerns about the double yellow lines were first raised with me by Arlene Foster MLA. Tom Elliott MLA, Phil Flanagan MLA and Cllr Alison Brimstone also expressed concerns. On 27 September media queries were received.

The decision to apply the lines was taken in November 2010 and to remove them in November 2011.

District Policing Partnerships

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice to detail the MLAs who have served as members of District Policing Partnerships in each of the last three years; and the remuneration received.
(AQW 6407/11-15)

Mr Ford: I attach a list of all those who as MLAs also served as members of District Policing Partnerships in each of the last three years and the remuneration received by each member:

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Trevor Clarke	£2,520.00	£2,520.00	£2,520.00
Pam Lewis	£4,410.00	£2,520.00	£2,520.00
Jim Shannon	£2,520.00	£2,520.00	£2,520.00

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Jonathan Bell	£2,520.00	£2,520.00	£2,520.00
Michelle McIlveen	£2,520.00	£2,520.00	£2,520.00
Declan O'Loan	£4,200.00	£2,520.00	£2,730.00
Nelson McCausland	£1,935.00	£3,450.00	£287.50
Wallace Browne	£2,520.00	£2,520.00	n/a
William Humphrey	n/a	n/a	£497.50
Naomi Long	£2,520.00	£630.00	n/a
Chris Lyttle	n/a	n/a	£1,378.55
David Hilditch	£2,520.00	£2,520.00	£2,520.00
Jimmy Spratt	£630.00	n/a	n/a
Roy Beggs	£2,520.00	£2,520.00	£2,520.00
John Dallat	£4,830.00	£420.00	n/a
Adrian McQuillan	£2,730.00	£4,830.00	£2,520.00
Ian McCrea	£2,520.00	£2,520.00	£630.00
Sydney Anderson	£2,520.00	£2,520.00	£2,520.00
Samuel Gardiner	£5,040.00	£2,520.00	£2,520.00
Stephen Moutray	£2,520.00	£2,520.00	£2,520.00
Pat Ramsay	£2,520.00	£2,520.00	£1,099.00
William Clarke	£2,520.00	£2,520.00	£2,520.00
Francie Molloy	£2,520.00	£2,520.00	£2,520.00
Trevor Lunn	£2,520.00	£2,520.00	£3,353.22
Paul Givan	n/a	n/a	£70.00
Paul Girvan	£2,520.00	£2,520.00	£2,520.00
Alex Easton	£5,040.00	£5,040.00	£2,520.00
Allan Bresland	£2,400.00	£2,400.00	£2,400.00
Claire McGill	£2,400.00	£2,400.00	£2,400.00

Policing and Community Safety Partnerships

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice whether MLAs will be entitled to serve on the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships, and if so, to detail the remuneration they will receive.
(AQW 6408/11-15)

Mr Ford: Where an MLA is also a district councillor, he/she will be entitled to serve on the new Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) as a political member, nominated by their District Council. Alternatively, there is no legal impediment to prevent a MLA being appointed as an independent member by the Northern Ireland Policing Board. However, MLAs who are members of the Policing Board are, under the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, disqualified from being a member of a PCSP. In addition, MLAs who sit on the Justice Committee would, by virtue of their membership, be unable to participate on a PCSP.

Regarding remuneration, all members of the PCSP will be entitled to claim a meeting expense payment of £60 per meeting for up to 20 meetings per year, plus travel and subsistence.

Legal Aid

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the 15 people who appeared at Craigavon Magistrates Court on 10 January 2012, to contest charges connected to an unlawful parade on 23 January 2011, (i) how many were granted legal aid; (ii) what is the cost of the legal aid in these cases to date; and (iii) how many (a) legal firms; and (b) counsel were instructed.
(AQW 6425/11-15)

Mr Ford: Of the 15 defendants summoned to court, 13 were granted legal aid to defend the charges at the Magistrates' Court. The case has been adjourned until 8 March.

To date claims of £538.56 (inc VAT of £85.48) have been received in respect of advice given to five of the defendants, under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act.

Seven firms of solicitors represented the defendants.

None of the defendants were granted legal aid to cover the instruction of counsel.

DOJ: Transfer of Functions to Local Government

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Justice, for each of the last five years, to detail the functions that (i) have been transferred; and (ii) are planned to be transferred from his Department to local councils, and of these, to detail (a) the reason behind the transfer of each function; (b) whether additional funding was offered to local councils to assist them in carrying out the functions; and (c) the cost, to his Department, of the final year when each of the functions were the responsibility of his Department; and (iii) may be transferred from his Department to local councils at a future date,
(AQW 6426/11-15)

Mr Ford: I can confirm that no functions have been transferred from my Department to local councils since the Department of Justice was established in April 2010, nor are there plans to transfer any functions.

For information on the transfer of functions relating to justice prior to devolution, you may wish to contact the Northern Ireland Office.

Maghaberry Prison: 22 December 2011 Event

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether the invitations to Cardinal Sean Brady and Archbishop Alan Harper, for a pre-Christmas visit to HMP Maghaberry, were issued on behalf of the Prison Service or in a private capacity.
(AQW 6428/11-15)

Mr Ford: Archbishop Harper and Cardinal Brady requested a visit to Maghaberry Prison. The purpose of the visit was to see the work of the prison Chaplaincy Service at first hand as well as other important services to prisoners. The request was made directly to NIPS Headquarters.

AQW 5983/11-15

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Justice why he published the background notes as well as his written answer to question AQW 5983/11-15.
(AQW 6442/11-15)

Mr Ford: The answer, including the background notes, to AQW/5983/11-15 was forwarded to the Northern Ireland Assembly Business Office on Wednesday 4 January 2012.

The Weekly Answer Booklet was prepared and printed on Friday 6 January and published on the Assembly website on Monday 9 January.

It was at this point that the administrative error of including the background notes was identified and steps were immediately taken to correct this. The background notes were removed from the Assembly website later on Monday 9 January, and this was confirmed to my office on the morning of Tuesday 10 January 2012.

Prison Officers: Training

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice what training is given to prison officers in respect of the exercise of their powers under Section 8 of the Prisons Act (NI) 1953.
(AQW 6453/11-15)

Mr Ford: Prison Officers receive appropriate instruction during induction training in respect of the exercise of their powers under Section 8 of the Prisons Act (Northern Ireland) 1953. Officers also receive on the job training depending on the specific task being undertaken.

Prison Officers: Suspension

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 6083-11-15, on which dates did each of the two members of Prison Service staff return to work following their suspension.
(AQW 6457/11-15)

Mr Ford: Following separate disciplinary hearings the suspensions were lifted on 2 December and 6 December. Both members of staff subsequently returned to work on 5 December and 12 December respectively.

John Deery: Death in Custody

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the death in custody of John Deery on 27 August 2009 in temporary healthcare accommodation at Bush House, HMP Maghaberry to detail (i) the number of staff currently suspended from duty, and the date of their suspensions; (ii) the date on which the Investigating Governor submitted the disciplinary report; (iii) the date on which each staff member was in receipt of formal disciplinary charges; (iv) the dates that each staff member appeared before the Adjudicating Governors; (v) the date the staff members were notified of the outcomes and recommended penalties; (vi) the date that the staff members concerned submitted appeals to Prison Service Headquarters; and (vii) the current status of these appeals.
(AQW 6476/11-15)

Mr Ford:

(i) Two staff are currently suspended from duty; they were suspended on 1 and 2 of October 2009 respectively.

(ii) The Investigating Governor submitted his investigation report on 8 February 2010.

(iii) Both staff members were charged on 11 February 2010.

(iv) One nursing officer appeared before the Adjudicating Governor on 12 April 2010.

One nursing officer appeared before the Adjudicating Governor on 20 September 2011.

(v) The first nursing officer was notified of the outcome of their disciplinary hearing on 15 April 2010. The recommended penalty was dismissal.

The second nursing officer was notified of the outcome of their disciplinary hearing on 03 November 2011. The recommended penalty was dismissal.

(vi) The first officer submitted an appeal to Prison Service Headquarters on 21 April 2010

The second officer submitted an appeal to Prison Service Headquarters on 15 November 2011

(vii) The appeals of the two nursing officers are currently being processed. A third officer who was dismissed on 10 October has appealed this decision to the Northern Ireland Prison Service Human Resource Director.

John Deery: Death in Custody

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice (i) whether Her Majesty's Coroner will hold preliminary hearings in 2012, into the circumstances surrounding the death of Mr John Deery in prison custody, prior to the formal inquest; (ii) whether it is the intention of the Prison Service that the members of staff, who are, currently suspended from duty will appear and give evidence at the inquest; and (iii) whether interviews have been conducted with these members of staff by the PSNI.
(AQW 6477/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Coroner intends to hold a preliminary hearing in order to resolve any procedural issues prior to the listing of the inquest. The date of the preliminary hearing is a matter for the Coroner.

It is for the Coroner to determine who will be called to give evidence at an inquest. Should a suspended member of Prison staff be required to attend the hearing, they will be instructed to do so by the Coroner. Being suspended would not preclude any staff member from giving evidence at an inquest where a Coroner requires their attendance.

The PSNI have provided statements from relevant persons for the purposes of the Coroner's investigation into the death.

Donagh Abuse Inquiry

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how the issues, concerning the treatment of survivors and victims of crime, that arose from the Donagh abuse inquiry have been addressed; and whether any members of the Donagh community were included in the discussions that determined how these issues would be addressed.
(AQW 6505/11-15)

Mr Ford: I invited the Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice to review the circumstances surrounding the McDermott case, and Dr Maguire published his findings in November 2010. Dr Maguire's report recommended that the Department of Justice should undertake a study to look at the feasibility of introducing community impact assessments to Northern Ireland. This work has now been completed and I published the feasibility study report on 12 January 2012. I can confirm that discussions were held with members of the Donagh community, both in the course of Dr Maguire's inspection and during the development of the feasibility study report.

Robert Black

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 61874/11-15, whether Robert Black has returned to his original prison in England; and if so, by what means did he return, and at what cost.
(AQW 6506/11-15)

Mr Ford: Mr Robert Black remains in custody in Northern Ireland. As the Northern Ireland Life Sentence Tariff of 25 years is now his dominant sentence, Robert Black will remain in custody in Northern Ireland unless he requests, and is accepted for, a transfer to prison elsewhere in the UK.

Prisoners: Consideration for Release

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he will amend legislation so that prisoners, particularly those sentenced for violent or sex offences, cannot be considered for release if they have wilfully refused to take part in the counselling and behaviour programmes designed to address their offending behaviour, on the grounds that their lack of rehabilitation would pose a risk to the public.
(AQW 6508/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008, which introduced indeterminate or extended public protection sentences for offenders convicted of serious or specified violent and sexual offences, already provides for rigorous risk assessment prior to consideration of release. The legislation requires that independent Parole Commissioners must, before directing an offender's release from custody, be satisfied that the offender no longer poses a significant risk of serious harm to the public. Participation in offending behaviour programmes or engagement with other rehabilitative services, and the degree to which this has minimised the risk to the public, are already important considerations in Parole Commissioners' assessment of an offender's suitability for release on licence.

The legislation also introduced determinate custodial sentences which can be imposed for other sexual and violent offences. Offenders are released on the completion of the custodial period of their sentence and are subject to post-release community supervision, remaining subject to recall to custody if they fail to satisfy licence conditions which are aimed at minimising their risk of reoffending.

DOJ: 0845 Numbers

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Justice how much revenue has been raised by his Department in each financial year since 2010 by the usage of 0845 numbers.
(AQW 6509/11-15)

Mr Ford: Since 12 April 2010, no revenue has been raised by the Department of Justice (excluding agencies and non departmental bodies) by the usage of 0845 numbers.

Alternative Dispute Resolution: Small Claims Courts

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how many cases have been resolved by alternative dispute resolution in small claims courts in each of the last five years.
(AQW 6523/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Small Claims Court provides a simple and straightforward system for resolving certain low value disputes, usually without the need for a solicitor or barrister.

Value for money is an important consideration and the small claims system is designed so that only those cases where a notice of intention to dispute is lodged proceed to a court hearing.

The table below sets out the information sought in respect of small claims cases for each of the last five years.

Year	Settled without being heard [1]	Total Cases Dealt With [2]	% of cases settled
2006	8,158	9,845	83%
2007	8,972	10,866	83%
2008	8,995	10,649	84%
2009	10,142	12,167	83%
2010	9,887	12,248	81%

1 Small claims that are settled without being heard include default judgments, office disposals and withdrawn cases dealt with during the period. These cases may have had a notice of dispute lodged, however the case has since been settled or withdrawn out of court.

2 Includes all small claims cases dealt with during the period.

As I indicated in my response to AQW1708-1710/11-15, the Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service reviewed the feasibility of introducing a court-based Small Claims Mediation Scheme, similar to that which exists in England and Wales. For the reasons outlined in that answer, the NICTS concluded that such a scheme would not deliver the same level of benefits, in particular in relation to reduced listing times, as realised in England.

It is open to parties in small claims proceedings to have recourse to third-party mediation where they wish to do so. However, information on the use of alternative dispute resolution in the Small Claims Court in this jurisdiction is not available.

Small Claims Court

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to outline the rationale behind the way in which the small claims court operates.
(AQW 6524/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Small Claims Court provides a simple and straightforward system for resolving certain low value disputes, usually without the need for a solicitor or barrister.

Value for money is an important consideration and the small claims system is designed so that only those cases where a notice of intention to dispute is lodged proceed to a court hearing.

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It is open to parties in small claims proceedings to have recourse to third-party mediation where they wish to do so. However, information on the use of alternative dispute resolution in the Small Claims Court in this jurisdiction is not available.

Small Claims Court

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what percentage of cases in the small claims court were settled rather than being contested in each of the last five years.
(AQW 6525/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Small Claims Court provides a simple and straightforward system for resolving certain low value disputes, usually without the need for a solicitor or barrister.

Value for money is an important consideration and the small claims system is designed so that only those cases where a notice of intention to dispute is lodged proceed to a court hearing.

The table below sets out the information sought in respect of small claims cases for each of the last five years.

Year	Settled without being heard [1]	Total Cases Dealt With [2]	% of cases settled
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It is open to parties in small claims proceedings to have recourse to third-party mediation where they wish to do so. However, information on the use of alternative dispute resolution in the Small Claims Court in this jurisdiction is not available.

Small Claims Court

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what account is taken of value for money in the thinking behind the operation of the small claims court.
(AQW 6530/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Small Claims Court provides a simple and straightforward system for resolving certain low value disputes, usually without the need for a solicitor or barrister.

Value for money is an important consideration and the small claims system is designed so that only those cases where a notice of intention to dispute is lodged proceed to a court hearing.

The table below sets out the information sought in respect of small claims cases for each of the last five years.

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It is open to parties in small claims proceedings to have recourse to third-party mediation where they wish to do so. However, information on the use of alternative dispute resolution in the Small Claims Court in this jurisdiction is not available.

Small Claims Court

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice who made the decision not to implement the same changes to our small claims court that were introduced in England and Wales.
(AQW 6532/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Small Claims Court provides a simple and straightforward system for resolving certain low value disputes, usually without the need for a solicitor or barrister.

Value for money is an important consideration and the small claims system is designed so that only those cases where a notice of intention to dispute is lodged proceed to a court hearing.

The table below sets out the information sought in respect of small claims cases for each of the last five years.

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It is open to parties in small claims proceedings to have recourse to third-party mediation where they wish to do so. However, information on the use of alternative dispute resolution in the Small Claims Court in this jurisdiction is not available.

Category 3 Sex Offender Released from Custody

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline the circumstances of how a Category 3 sex-offender (i) was released from custody, at the end of his sentence in 2006, to reside in the same area (a) as that of the victim of his offence; and (b) in which the offence occurred; (ii) was able to breach a Sexual Offences Prevention Order on numerous occasions without arrest; and (iii) was able to sexually assault another woman on 1 February 2011.
(AQW 6576/11-15)

Mr Ford: I cannot comment on the detail of any individual case or alleged case.

Offenders who have reached the end of their custodial sentence have to be released. Sex offenders and certain violent offenders who meet the criteria for risk assessment under the public protection arrangements will be assessed to determine if management of risk through the public protection arrangements is required. If the risk posed by the offender is assessed as requiring multi agency management, a risk management plan will be put in place. As part of the risk management plan, and prior to release, the agencies concerned will input to any conditions of release or other court orders. If not already in place, and if necessary to protect the public, an application will be made to the courts for a sexual offences prevention order, which will place prohibitions on what the offender can do. As part of the risk management plan, the question of appropriate accommodation will be addressed.

Prohibitions placed on the offender by a SOPO will be enforced by the police and the sentencing framework for breach of an order provides for a maximum penalty of 5 years imprisonment, including, in the most serious cases, an extended sentence for public protection.

These complex and sophisticated arrangements aim to reduce as much as possible the risk posed by such offenders. They cannot, however, eradicate all risk.

Prisoner Amenity Fund

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice who contibutes to the Prisoners Amenity Fund.
(AQW 6578/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Prisoner Amenity Fund (PAF) exists to deliver projects related to the welfare and benefit of all categories of prisoner. It also facilitates events for prisoners and their families.

The PAF is financed from a range of sources, including tuck shop profits, recycling initiatives, uncollected inmate cash account balances, profit from sales of goods made in workshops, the prisoner telephone system and prisoner television rental fees.

In this way, prisoners' cash spent in prisons is channelled back towards providing benefits, for prisoners, which would not normally be funded by the public purse.

Legal Aid: Payment of Solicitors

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether the solicitors of clients who have been granted legal aid at a magistrates' court are paid per court appearance.
(AQW 6580/11-15)

Mr Ford: Criminal legal aid in the Magistrates' Court is paid under a standard fee regime. The standard fees cover all preparation and attendances at court by the solicitor. In certain circumstances further additional fees are available for solicitors. These include certain prescribed application fees, representation at contests and committal hearings exceeding one day.

Standard fees cover the majority of cases in the Magistrates' Courts but separate provision is also available for special rates of payment for a very small number of very high cost proceedings which cannot be covered by the standard fees. The special rates include a fixed fee per day for solicitors at representation in these proceedings.

Solicitors of clients who have been granted criminal legal aid at the Magistrates' Courts prior to 30 September 2009 are paid via the old remuneration system of hourly rates or composite fees for preparation, advocacy and attendance at court where counsel is assigned.

Civil legal aid may also be granted at a Magistrates' Court, although the number of instances on which this power is exercised is very small. The remuneration arrangements under civil legal aid vary according to the nature of the proceedings, and whether or not payment is made per court appearance depends on the precise circumstances of the case.

Records of Interviews with Terrorists

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice what assistance and support his Department has given to the PSNI in its quest for access to the records of interviews with terrorists which are held by Boston College; and whether, in the interest of tackling unsolved terrorist crimes, he will declare support for the release of the entire records archive to the PSNI.
(AQW 6588/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department does not, and should not, have a role in the investigation of crime by the PSNI and has not been involved in this issue. I am committed to upholding the independence of the Chief Constable in such matters. For that reason I do not intend to offer comment on evidence the PSNI might seek in this or other cases.

Illegal Parades

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Justice how many people have been (i) charged; and (ii) convicted in relation to illegal parades in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6593/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Public Prosecution Service (PPS) has provided the following information. It relates to charges and convictions of individuals in relation to illegal parades and protests which took place between 1 January 2009 and 31 December 2011:

	Charged	Convicted	Ongoing
2009	5	2	2
2010	42	29	6
2011	46	3	43

Prisoners: Re-offending

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Justice how many people, who have been released from prison in each of the last five years after serving a sentence for rape or sexual assault, have since reoffended.
(AQW 6594/11-15)

Mr Ford: The measurement of reoffending requires a period of time to be allowed following release from custody during which any reoffedning would be recorded; and then further time to allow for prosecution and conviction. The most recent period for which reoffending figures are available for those released from immediate custody is 2007, the earliest period is 2004.

Individual offence details are not available for all of this cohort; however the overall offence classification is. Therefore the figures given cover people released from sentenced custody for the range of sexual offences.

Between 2004 and 2007 the number of those imprisoned where the primary offence was sexual, who committed a further offence within 12 months of release from custody and were convicted within 18 months, is shown below:

	Year of release			
	2004	2005	2006	2007
Released	61	47	67	59
Reoffended	3	2	9	9

Fireworks: Illegal Possession

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what is the sentencing range for the illegal possession of fireworks.
(AQW 6693/11-15)

Mr Ford: A number of pieces of legislation control the sale, acquisition, handing, carriage and storage of fireworks. The principal statute relevant to this question is the Explosives (Fireworks) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2002. It makes it an offence to

possess fireworks without a licence (regulation 4). Contravention of this requirement is an offence and a person is liable on summary conviction to a fine up to £5000 (regulation 13).

Reducing Re-offending

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Justice whether he has implemented any money saving schemes aimed at reducing re-offending, apart from the Inspire Women's Project.
(AQW 6704/11-15)

Mr Ford: Reducing re-offending is one of my Department's key priorities and, through the development of a Reducing Offending Strategic Framework, should ultimately significantly lessen the cost of crime across Government and society.

While individual schemes to reduce offending could potentially contribute to making some savings, their immediate focus is on influencing offending behaviour rather than directly on saving money.

The time spent by offenders in custody and on supervision in the community offers a significant opportunity to work with them to tackle the causes of their offending. Consistent delivery of offender behaviour programmes, both in custody and in the community, together with other supportive interventions, can make a major contribution to reducing re-offending. Programmes available for offenders address various issues such as accommodation, debt, benefits, health, addictions, employment, education/training, and children/parenting issues.

Dedicated multi-disciplinary offender management teams in each prison establishment are responsible for the delivery of all risk assessment, sentence planning and interventions work, as well as for the preparation of offenders for release from custody. The teams consist of NIPS staff, Probation Officers, psychologists, voluntary and community sector (VCS) personnel and chaplains. The Service takes a robust multi-agency approach to resettlement, and prisoners are referred at an appropriate stage to those interventions best suited to address their risk and needs.

A multi agency resettlement agenda has been developed by NIPS which works in partnership with the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, Housing Rights and other partner agencies to assist offenders prepare for release and to make a successful transition from custody to the community.

The Department directly sponsors NIACRO and Extern which deliver a wide range of diversionary programmes, with offenders in custody and in the community, to reduce re-offending and help them to deal with problems that have contributed to their previous offending. Both bodies work in collaboration with NIPS, PBNI and the Youth Justice Agency, as well as other Government Departments and Agencies.

Reducing Offending in Partnership also brings together agencies in local areas to prioritise interventions with prolific offenders who cause crime in their locality, to reduce crime and reoffending. Organisations involved include PSNI, Court Service, Youth Justice Agency, Health and Social Care Trust, Probation Board and PPS.

Criminal Justice agencies also engage directly with accredited community-based restorative justice schemes on the delivery of restorative alternatives to traditional court prosecution. These can deal with minor offending in a timely and proportionate way assisting offenders in desisting from future offending whilst also enhancing victim satisfaction and community confidence.

Help for Offenders to Integrate into Society

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Justice what strategies his Department has in place, outside prisons, to help offenders integrate into society.
(AQW 6705/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department works with a wide range of partners in helping offenders integrate into the community following custody. While the justice system can do much to facilitate such integration, it is essential that offenders and ex-offenders receive support from a wide range of statutory bodies, in areas such as housing, drug and alcohol addictions, finance and benefits, mental health and employment and training, if they are to integrate effectively into society.

Both the Northern Ireland Prison Service and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland offer programmes to address issues that may prevent offenders from fully resettling into their community. There must be a continuity of service provision between prison and the community. Release planning is recognised as a vital transition phase between custody and the community, allowing sufficient time to engage other service providers and plan any actions necessary prior to a prisoner's eventual release from custody. Once a prisoner is released, the community-based part of the through care takes on more prominence. Most (but not all) released prisoners will be subject to supervision on licence by PBNI, which has statutory responsibility for the oversight of licences. A range of voluntary and community providers work in partnership with PBNI to ensure that an offender resettles successfully in the community.

Some of the most successful and innovative projects involve cooperation between the voluntary, statutory and community sectors, for example, the Jobtrack project: a partnership between prison and probation services and NIACRO supports adult male and female prisoners and ex-offenders on probation in the community, to gain employment. This target group includes many who are excluded from society and face multiple barriers to joining the labour market.

PBNI also provides financial assistance to organisations offering services that seek to challenge and change attitudes and behaviour of offenders. Invitation for Applications for 2012-13 closed on 25th November 2011. Funding was available for activities to be provided for adjudicated offenders in the following areas:

- personal development/mentoring/interpersonal skills/healthy lifestyles;
- offending behaviour programmes; and
- supervision of offenders under a Community Service Order.

PBNI and NIPS work in partnership with NIACRO and the Women's Support Network (WSN) to link women offenders attending the Inspire Women's Project into the services of over 50 community-based women's centres, women's projects and other provision across Northern Ireland. These centres provide a diverse range of services that support women in the resettlement process. For example, education, training and employability programmes; advice clinics; complementary therapies; life coaching; arts and crafts; cookery; counselling; and health and well-being programmes. By encouraging women offenders to engage with voluntary and community organisations during their sentence, it is expected that they will continue to avail of these services once contact with PBNI has ceased. This will mean that the women will be receiving ongoing support to help them to resettle and reintegrate back into their community, which should reduce the likelihood of re-offending.

Community Sentencing

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Justice what steps he is taking to make further use of alternatives to custody such as community sentencing.
(AQO 1109/11-15)

Mr Ford: In response to a commitment made in the Hillsborough Castle Agreement, I consulted last year on a review of community sentences, which explored the role, scope and effectiveness of current community disposals, opened up the debate on the value of short prison sentences for low level offenders, and sought views on the need for change.

Reducing offending is one of my priorities and the aim of my review was to determine how we can use community sentences to have the greatest impact on reoffending and on how we secure higher levels of victim and community confidence in them.

My officials are currently in discussion with the Justice Committee on draft proposals on the way forward, in light of responses to the consultation - the consensus of responses was that custody for this cohort of offenders should be used as a last resort – and the recommendation of the Prisons Review Report that community sentences should be the preferred method of dealing with those who would otherwise get short custodial sentences.

I hope to announce definitive proposals on the way forward in the near future.

Article 4 of the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1988

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice, following the acquittal of Colin Duffy, for his assessment of the working and adequacy of Article 4 of the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1988.
(AQW 7002/11-15)

Mr Ford: Article 4 of the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1988 permits a Court or jury to draw an adverse inference in defined circumstances if an accused person refuses to give evidence or to answer any question. It remains an important and useful part of the criminal law. Whilst I have no current plans to change Article 4 I am open to representations to changes to any aspect of criminal law.

Sexual Offences Prevention Orders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the increase in the number of breaches of Sex Offender Protection Orders, what proposals there are to review the terms of monitoring as well as the sentences given to persons who breach these orders.
(AQO 1116/11-15)

Mr Ford: Public protection arrangements in Northern Ireland are among the most sophisticated risk management systems for sex offenders anywhere in the world. Criminal Justice Inspection carried out its fourth review of the PPANI arrangements last year and reported in July 2011. The Chief Inspector commended developments and welcomed the attention which had been given to strengthening the arrangements.

Sentencing for breach offences is a matter for the courts. The sentencing framework is a stringent one – breach of a SOPO can attract a maximum sentence of imprisonment of 5 years and the court can make this an extended sentence under public protection sentencing.

Prison Review: Recommendation 21

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the establishment of the change management team as outlined in Recommendation 21 of the Prison Review Report.
(AQO 1117/11-15)

Mr Ford: Colin Bennett was appointed as Organisational Change Manager on 14 December 2011 and is currently supported by a Finance and Corporate Services Project Manager. The Offender Services Project Manager has been appointed and is expected to take up post shortly and NIPS is currently seeking to secure an individual with appropriate HR expertise to complete the Team.

PSNI: Terms and Conditions

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Justice whether terms and conditions of agency, consultant and associate staff in the PSNI require an oath and code of ethics, which is subject to scrutiny by the Policing Board and to investigation by the Police Ombudsman.
(AQO 1118/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 requires all police officers to take an oath, and requires the Policing Board to issue a Code of Ethics for police officers. A breach of the Code may result in a criminal or disciplinary investigation either by the Police Ombudsman or the PSNI.

The Police Act provisions do not extend to agency, consultancy or associate staff employed by the PSNI.

The terms and conditions of such staff, and the administrative arrangements in place in respect of conduct and accountability for such staff are operational matters for the Chief Constable, who is accountable to the Northern Ireland Policing Board in place in respect of conduct and accountability of these staff.

Police: Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings Scheme

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Justice how many former members of the Part-Time Police Reserve have applied to be moved under the Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings scheme since the payment of the gratuity.
(AQO 1119/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have been advised that one application for SPED has been received from a former Member of the Part Time Reserve since the issue of the gratuity payment letters.

Minister of Justice

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the outcome of the recent talks at Stormont Castle regarding the appointment of the Justice Minister.
(AQO 1120/11-15)

Mr Ford: I attended recent Party talks in relation to the appointment of the Mister of Justice on Tuesday 10 January as Leader of the Alliance Party. As Justice Minister my interest lies in the Department of Justice being able to continue functioning after 1 May 2012.

Maghaberry Prison: Protests

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the republican protest and associated disruption on 25 and 26 November 2011 at HMP Maghaberry, what plans he has to review arrangements to ensure that any future protest by any organisation will not prevent the normal operation of the prison.
(AQO 1121/11-15)

Mr Ford: The operation in response to the protest on 25 and 26 November by supporters of separated republican prisoners was a joint operation between NIPS and PSNI. It was neither lawful nor practical to prevent protesters coming on to NIPS land during the protest.

With the exception of visits, which were cancelled to prevent a breach of security or confrontation between protesters and visitors, the normal operation of the prison was not effected.

Department for Regional Development

Illegal Parking in Disabled Parking Bays

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Regional Development how many unauthorised drivers have been prosecuted for parking in disabled parking bays in public car parks in each of the last five years, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 6207/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Parking a vehicle in a designated disabled person's parking space without clearly displaying a valid Blue Badge is a decriminalised parking contravention, for which a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) may be issued by a Traffic Attendant.

My Department's Roads Service has advised that it does not compile data for a specific contravention on a constituency or regional basis. However, since the commencement of Decriminalised Parking Enforcement in Northern Ireland, in November 2006, the numbers of PCNs issued to vehicles parked in a disabled person's space in Roads Service car-parks, without clearly displaying a valid badge, are as follows:

Time Period	Number of PCNs Issued
November 2006 – March 2007	420
April 2007 – March 2008	1473
April 2008 – March 2009	1019
April 2009 – March 2010	1095
April 2010 – March 2011	1571

Bus Shelters

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development what provision his Department has made to provide bus shelters now that the previous contract has expired.
(AQW 6227/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Roads Service officials have advised that the current contract for the provision and maintenance of bus shelters in Northern Ireland, between my Department and Adshel, has delivered over 1350 new bus shelters since 2001, at no cost to my Department. Whilst the contract does not expire until 2015, it does not make provision for any new shelters after 2010, as there is insufficient time left for Adshel to recoup its costs from advertising income.

My Department's Roads Service could provide shelters if necessary, before 2015 but this would require a separate procurement exercise.

To ensure the future development of bus shelters, my Department will establish new contractual arrangements to be in place for 2015.

I would further advise that local councils can also provide bus shelters, should they wish to do so.

Oil Spills on Roads

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of oil spills occurring on roads in the last three years; (ii) the cost of clearing up these oil spills; and (iii) the steps that have been taken to address the issue of oil spills on roads.
(AQW 6238/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the information requested for the first two parts of your question is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. However, it has provided details on the steps that are taken to address oil spills on roads.

Roads Service deals with oil spills, which includes road traffic accident collision site clean ups, on a reactive basis. When Roads Service receives a report of an oil spill during office hours, a Road Service Inspector is sent to investigate and establish the nature and extent of the problem. If remedial work is considered necessary, a Roads Service works squad is sent to the location and places signs warning drivers of the potential slippery road conditions. It will then undertake action to contain the oil, to prevent it entering any adjacent drains or watercourses, and appropriate treatment such as sand, oil absorbent granules or oil dispersing agents will then be applied to the affected area of road surface.

In other situations where treatment is requested by the PSNI, following a road traffic accident or if an emergency call is received out of office hours, a Roads Service works squad is sent directly to the location and treat the affected road surface in the same manner as previously described.

If the oil spill is very large a multi-organisational approach may be required. In such instances, the emergency services and/or the Environment Agency will undertake the clean-up operation, with Roads Service providing assistance as required.

Bus Contracts

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the value of the bus contracts his Department has placed with Wright Bus, Ballymena in the last five years.
(AQW 6240/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has not been involved directly in the tender for bus contracts as these are awarded by Translink.

Translink advises that they have not placed any contracts with Wrightbus in the last 5 years.

However, Wrightbus has produced bodies for the Translink vehicles, as part of their contractual arrangements with other tenderers, for a substantial number of bus replacement projects. The Department is not aware of the commercial arrangements between Wrightbus and main contractors.

Parking on Kerbs or Footpaths

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has any plans to change the law on cars parking on kerbs or footpaths.
(AQW 6275/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that there is currently no general prohibition on parking on footways, except for the parking of heavy commercial vehicles which is prohibited and is a matter for the PSNI to enforce.

However, where there are parking restrictions on the adjacent carriageway, indicated by road markings and/or traffic signs, the restrictions will generally also apply to the footway. These restrictions are enforceable by Roads Service traffic attendants. In areas where there are no marked or signed parking restrictions on the carriageway, and parking on footways is creating an obstruction, the matter can be referred to the PSNI, who have the powers to deal with it.

Roads Service officials have further advised that many of our streets can only function if footway parking is tolerated. In these streets, the widths are such that cars have to be parked on the footway so that sufficient road space remains for other vehicles using the street. Therefore, a general ban on footway parking would require a complementary waiting restriction on one side of the street, which would severely reduce the availability of parking spaces.

Given the above, I currently have no plans to change the law on cars parking on footways.

Northway, Portadown

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister for Regional Development what assessment he has made of the danger to road users arising from the current layout of Northway, Portadown.
(AQW 6283/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it is currently investigating safety concerns at this location in conjunction with the PSNI and Translink. Once the outcome of this investigation is known, I will arrange to have the Member advised accordingly.

Banbridge: Bus Station

Mr S Anderson asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the timetable for the commencement of work on building a bus station in Banbridge.
(AQW 6285/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Construction of a bus station and off-street bus facilities in Banbridge is a matter that has been under consideration for some time. However, my Department's Roads Service has advised that difficulties have arisen over land issues and identification of a suitable site for such a facility. These issues have still to be resolved. Discussions between Road Service officials and Translink are currently ongoing regarding this matter.

There is no provision for a project to improve this facility in Translink's current Corporate Plan but this is reviewed annually in light of funding available. This will be discussed with my Department.

Resurfacing: Kilmaine Road and Perry Road, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the resurfacing of the Kilmaine and Perry Roads in Bangor.
(AQW 6310/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the footways on Kilmaine Road, Bangor were reconstructed in August 2011. The resurfacing of the carriageway is currently at construction stage and it is anticipated that it will be completed by the end of January 2012.

The resurfacing of Perry Road, Bangor from Ballycrochan Road to Perry Drive was completed in July 2011.

The remaining section of Perry Road from Perry Drive to Albany Road is not scheduled for resurfacing. Roads Service will continue to carry out periodic inspections on Perry Road in accordance with its Maintenance Standards for Safety and any surface defects identified as being hazardous to the public will be programmed for repair.

Response times specified for the repair of defects are dependent on the severity of the defect and range from one calendar day to inclusion in the next work programme for that particular route.

Surface defects which are identified outside of these inspection regimes, that is, those reported by members of the public or as the result of ad-hoc inspections are also dealt with according to the above standards and remedial work arranged as necessary.

Grit Boxes: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many new grit boxes have been provided in the North Down area for this winter period.
(AQW 6311/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: During the current winter period, to date, my Department's Roads Service has provided 16 new salt bins in the North Down area for this winter period.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development, given that the Department of the Environment has forecast a significant growth in greenhouse gas emissions as a result of transportation and that, in the last 15 years, traffic volume has grown by 43 percent, what targets his Department has for the overall levels of road traffic.
(AQW 6345/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is committed to reducing the impact of road transport on the environment. Through the Cross-Departmental Working Group on Greenhouse Gas Emissions, DRD have worked closely with other departments to develop an action plan to meet the Executive's climate change target.

That action plan, published in February 2011, highlights the steps DRD and other Departments are currently taking and recommends the areas in which we need to step up our commitment.

The action plan provides for a particular focus on driving modal shift from the private car to public transport and active travel. This reflects the direction established in the Regional Transportation Strategy which originally covered the 10 year period from 2002 through to 2012. The strategy set out a significant programme of investment in public transport in particular as a result of which the historic decline of public transport passenger numbers was reversed. This enabled the Department to revise upwards our PSA target of 70 million passenger journeys per annum to an ambitious target of 77 million.

While recognising that success, emissions from transport have continued to rise reflecting the growth of the local economy and car ownership over the last decade. It is clear more needs to be done and that is why the revised Regional Transportation Strategy, which was published for consultation in March 2011, has proposed the use of a Policy Prioritisation Framework to direct Strategic Transport Interventions. These interventions will be assessed for their ability to contribute to a Strategic Objective before they are included in a Delivery Plan. As the costed Delivery Plan is developed, specific targets for achievement will be set, including targets for greenhouse gas emissions. These targets will assume full implementation of the Strategic Transportation Interventions in the Delivery Plans and will be both challenging and realistic.

Plugged-in Places Scheme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of electric cars purchased under the Plugged-In Places scheme; and (ii) the cost of the scheme to date.
(AQW 6348/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

(i) The Northern Ireland 'Plugged In Places' scheme is a joint initiative with the Department of the Environment and a range of Consortium Partners. The scheme aims to pilot electric vehicle infrastructure in 6 Council locations across Northern Ireland in Year 1, with further expansion to approx. 10 new Council areas across the region in Year 2. The scheme does not provide support for the purchase of electric cars. Support for the purchase of electric vehicles is, however, provided through the Whitehall 'Plug-In Grant' initiative, and, to date 7 electric vehicles have been purchased in Northern Ireland with support of this programme. This number is expected to increase over the coming years as the number of available electric vehicles increases and as public charge points are installed across Northern Ireland.

(ii) In total, an investment of over £2 million is being made in the Northern Ireland 'Plugged In Places' scheme. My Department is contributing £250,000 over the course of the project with the remainder coming from the Office for Low Emission Vehicles and the consortium. It is expected that my Department will contribute £150,000 this year.

Kilcooley Primary School: Road Access

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department intends to take to improve the road access to Kilcooley Primary School.
(AQW 6355/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that there are currently no plans to alter the existing access arrangements at Kilcooley Primary School.

Cove Close, Ballyronan

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 4558/11-15, to provide an update on Roads Service's position on enforcement in relation to Cove Close, Ballyronan.
(AQW 6419/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that having served the requisite Article 11 notice on the developer in February 2011, in respect of the completion of outstanding infrastructure works in Cove Close, Ballyronan and the developer's continued lack of commitment to complete the works, it has now instructed its contractor to undertake the work.

I understand that work commenced on site during the week commencing 16 January 2012 and it is anticipated that it will take three weeks to complete. Roads Service will be recovering the costs from the Developer's road bond.

Reservoirs: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many reservoirs in the North Down area are surplus to requirements.
(AQW 6420/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that there are seven reservoirs in the North Down area which are considered surplus to requirements. The reservoirs are Ballysallagh Upper and Lower, Conlig Upper and Lower, Creightons Green, Church Road and Portavo.

Footpath from Cloughmills Village to the Local GAA Pitch on the Ballyveeley Road

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development when Roads Service will provide a footpath from Cloughmills village to the local GAA pitch on the Ballyveeley Road.
(AQW 6421/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that a scheme proposal to provide a footway on Ballyveely Road has met the criteria to progress for further more detailed appraisal. This proposal has been added to a list of similar schemes in the Ballymoney Borough Council area that will be developed, in accordance with current policy and procedures.

Subject to gaining approval at the various stages of the development process, a scheme proposal may then progress through to prioritisation, within a future year's programme. Prioritisation will take account of a number of other key issues, including future funding availability.

Motorway and Trunk Road Network

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the distance as a total, and as a percentage, of the motorway and trunk road network that is deemed to be in a satisfactory condition.
(AQW 6432/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that regular inspections are carried out to ensure the entire road network, including motorways and trunk roads, is maintained in a safe condition for road users.

There is, however, an ongoing resurfacing programme which aims to address issues of riding quality and structural integrity on motorways and trunk roads, as well as on the remainder of the road network.

DRD: Transfer of Functions to Local Government

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Regional Development, for each of the last five years, to detail the functions that (i) have been transferred; and (ii) are planned to be transferred from his Department to local councils, and of these, to detail (a) the reason behind the transfer of each function; (b) whether additional funding was offered to local councils to assist them in carrying out the functions; and (c) the cost, to his Department, of the final year when each of the functions were the responsibility of his Department; and (iii) may be transferred from his Department to local councils at a future date,
(AQW 6433/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Executive agreed in September 2009 that the following public realm aspects of local roads functions should transfer from Roads Service to Local Government:

- Pedestrian permits;
- Permitting local events to be held on roads;
- Alleygating; and
- Off-street parking/on-street parking enforcement (although, the policy responsibility for parking would remain within the Department).

It had been planned that these functions would transfer to Local Government by May 2011. However, the Executive agreed in June 2010 to re-frame the timetable for the reform of Local Government, which would see these functions transfer by 2015. The Environment Minister is currently consulting with his Executive colleagues on the range of functions that could transfer to Local Government.

In the interim period, my Department has introduced legislation which will enable local Councils to close roads for special events (apart from cycle races, road races and parades). Officials from my Department and Local Government are developing guidance that will enable Councils to undertake this function later this year. There are no costs associated with this work and consequently there is no need to transfer resources to local Councils.

I understand that the Department of the Environment has introduced legislation which will enable Councils to make orders for the erection of Alleygates on relevant roads. This is due to come into operation in April 2012. Again, there are no costs associated with this work and consequently there is no need to transfer resources to local Councils.

DRD: 0845 Numbers

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Regional Development how much revenue has been raised by his Department in each of the last three financial years by the usage of 0845 numbers.
(AQW 6437/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Department operates six 0845 numbers. Two more are provided through an external contractor and a further two operated by Northern Ireland Water.

There is no revenue generated for DRD from any of these numbers.

Free All-Ireland Travel on the Derry to Dublin Bus Route

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development whether any charge has ever been applied to passengers who were entitled to free all-Ireland travel on the Derry to Dublin bus route.
(AQW 6498/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am aware that the X33 bus service which operated on the Londonderry to Dublin/Dublin Airport route during the summer of 2011 did not participate in Irish Free Travel Scheme and also that travel on this express service did not come within the Northern Ireland concessionary fares scheme.

However, if the Member has a particular case in mind where a person was improperly charged, he should bring it to my attention.

Londonderry to Coleraine Railway Line

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the relaying of the Derry to Coleraine railway line.
(AQW 6500/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Subsequent to my decision to bring forward the Coleraine to Londonderry project, officials in my Department issued a Letter of Offer to Translink in October 2011 so that work on the project could start. Invitations to Tender for the contract for phase one of the project were issued in December 2011 and the tendering process continues. Translink expects that detailed design works will begin in March and, subject to commercial arrangements being agreed, work will start on site in July 2012. The track will be closed from this point onward until phase one of the project is completed in April 2013. Bus substitution is being considered currently. Phase one involves the re-laying of the end sections of the line and completing essential bridge works on those parts with costs estimated to be £27m.

The second phase, to be completed during 2015, involves re-signalling works and construction of a new passing loop. The cost of this phase is estimated at around £20m.

The third phase is the full relay of the track. This will be completed in 2021 and the cost is estimated at £31m.

Bus Route between Enniskillen and Derry

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on a direct bus route between Enniskillen and Derry.
(AQW 6544/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has advised that it has had some initial discussions with relevant community groups and is actively working towards putting in place a timetable that will enhance current Ulsterbus services from Enniskillen enabling passengers to enjoy better integration with the Goldline network at Omagh which allows for onward travel to Londonderry/Altnagelvin.

Translink has committed to contacting Community Transport representatives in Enniskillen/Omagh and Departmental officials in the near future to discuss how a partnership approach could work to provide the best possible service for the public but is still cost effective.

Given that this is a very rural area, there will inevitably be limitations in relation to geographical coverage of the proposed service.

NI Water: Contracts

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development how many NI Water contracts are currently going through the procurement process; and when each of procurement process began.
(AQW 6555/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that at 31 December 2011, 23 contracts were going through the procurement process. Details of the contracts and the commencement dates are set out in the table below.

Tender Title	Date Procurement Process Began
Standby Generators	26 February 2010
Compressors and Blowers	26 February 2010

Tender Title	Date Procurement Process Began
Instrumentation, Control, Automation Framework	2 April 2010
Professional Services Support Framework	11 May 2010
Rotation Biological Contactors	15 June 2010
Water Efficiency and Base Maintenance Programme	1 February 2011
Reservoir Refurbishment Framework	6 June 2011
Castor Bay To Belfast Trunk Main	4 July 2011
Supply and delivery of sludge press cloths to water treatment works	10 October 2011
High Volume Call Application	14 October 2011
Provision of Cleaning Services	18 October 2011
Supply, replacement & regeneration of granular activated carbon	20 October 2011
Strule Abstraction Project	21 October 2011
Supply & Delivery of Filter Media	25 October 2011
Catering at Antrim Training Centre	11 November 2011
Vehicle Plant and Street Works	17 November 2011
Professional Services Support Framework 2	21 November 2011
Monaclogh Service Reservoir	29 November 2011
Valve Tower Refurbishment Works Package 3	6 December 2011
Valve Tower Refurbishment Works Package 2	7 December 2011
Capital Delivery Framework	7 December 2011
Unmetered Electricity	8 December 2011
Provision of Counselling and Welfare Services	21 December 2011

NI Water: Contracts

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development how many contracts NI Water has awarded in the last twelve months; and how long the procurement process took for each of these contracts.
(AQW 6557/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that in the period from 1 January 2011 to the end of December 2011 it awarded 473 contracts. The table below details the duration of the procurement process for these contracts.

Total Number of Contracts	Duration of Procurement Process			
	0 – 3 months	3 – 6 months	6 – 12 months	> 12 months
473	421	30	20	2

Sewerage Infrastructure: Millisle

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what improvements are required to allow the sewerage infrastructure in the Millisle area to meet EU standards.
(AQW 6586/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that it has identified upgrading work to the sewerage infrastructure in Millisle, which will ensure compliance with EU Bathing Water standards. The work, which will cost £2.2 million, is being undertaken in two stages. The first stage involves upgrading work in the Moss Road area and this is now nearing completion. The second stage will provide a new wastewater pumping station in Ballycopeland Presbyterian Church car park to replace the existing station on the Shore Road. Work is planned to commence in late 2012 subject to the completion of all statutory requirements and land acquisition.

Road Closure: Special Events

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there is guidance in place to assist district councils and promoters to close roads for special events.
(AQW 6686/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service is currently working closely with representatives from the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE) to finalise the guidance to assist district councils and promoters to close roads for special events.

Once the guidance has been agreed and SOLACE has indicated that Councils are content, a commencement order will be made and responsibility for road closures for special events will then rest with Councils.

Coleraine to Londonderry Railway Line

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) whether there is a £9 million shortfall in the budget for the Coleraine to Londonderry NIR 2013/14 relay, and if so, whether this will delay the renewal of the signalling system; and (iii) whether the Londonderry signal box will remain operational until the signalling renewal is completed.
(AQW 6751/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer you to my statement to the Assembly on 10 October. This refers to the re-phasing of the overall Coleraine to Londonderry re-lay. Specifically that phase 2 to complete by April 2012 would consist of a re-laying of the end sections of the line and completion of essential bridge works on those sections. The statement also refers to Phase 2 to involve completion of re-signalling works between Coleraine and Londonderry and construction of a new passing loop in 2015.The tendering process for phase 1 of the Coleraine to Londonderry track relay is currently underway and Translink expect to appoint a contractor in March 2012. A robust cost estimate will be available when the tender process is complete. I have secured the necessary funding for phase 1 from within my own capital budget and there is no shortfall.

The figure of £9m you refer to was an initial estimate of potential costs for re-signalling which now forms part of Phase 2, which is due to be complete during 2015. Translink has advised that while budgets for Phase 2 have yet to be finalised, a shortfall of £9 million has not been identified. Translink advise that the Londonderry signal box will remain operational until the signalling works are completed.

Property at 3 Belfast Road, Ballynure

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Regional Development why Roads Service has not taken steps to sell the property at 3 Belfast Road, Ballynure, despite having secured vacant possession from the tenant and the property's considerable development potential and open market value.
(AQW 6774/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that sale of the property at 3 Belfast Road, Ballynure has been agreed with the sitting tenant, in accordance with government disposal procedures, as laid down by Department of Finance and Personnel's Land and Property Services. Departmental Solicitor's Office is currently completing the legal formalities.

Winning in Europe: European Priorities 2011-12

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development how he is using EU policies, networks and programmes to achieve the key objective to source funding for key rail projects designed to reduce congestion and emissions, as detailed in 'Winning in Europe: European Priorities 2011-12'.
(AQW 6784/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: On 10 January 2012, the European Commission launched the call for proposals under the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) annual programme, making €200 million available to co-finance projects in several specific priority areas. My Department intend to submit an application for funding for the Coleraine to Londonderry relay. If successful, the project would attract 10% funding towards the £46m project.

In addition, The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) issued a call on 3 January 2012, across all themes of the INTERREG IVA programme. Officials intend making an application for funding towards the planned £3.6m redevelopment of Portadown Railway Station.

Transport: North Coast

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to improve the transport infrastructure around the North Coast in preparation for the Irish Open Golf Competition, and to help encourage the British Open Golf Competition to come to the resort.
(AQO 1130/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I welcome the award of the Irish Open Golf Competition to Portrush and acknowledge the important role that infrastructure plays in facilitating such a tournament.

My Department's Roads Service has advised that recent infrastructure improvements, such as the A26 Ballee scheme at Ballymena and the A2 Broadbridge dualling at Londonderry, have provided improved links to Portrush.

Unfortunately, due to the lengthy development period required for major road projects, Members will appreciate that major interventions at this point would not impact on this summer's tournament.

However, I can assure Members that officials from my Department will be involved in the off-course event delivery as part of a Steering Group that has been established to ensure effective co-ordination of the wider event planning, and will include members from relevant Government Departments and Public Service Bodies, in addition to golf officials.

I have established a Traffic Management Group within my Department, led by Roads Service, to consider traffic management both around the course and on the main routes into the area. In addition, Translink will be reviewing its bus and train services in order to cater for the large number of people expected to be attending the event

The Irish Open will present an opportunity to assess how our current infrastructure meets the demands of a major spectator event of this nature and what improvements may be required if we are to host a tournament of the stature of the British Open Golf Championship.

A5 Road Scheme: Reallocation of Funding

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Regional Development if he has made any plans, or has had any discussions, with other Departments regarding the reallocation of the funding for the A5 road scheme.
(AQO 1128/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As you are aware, the Irish Government has deferred the provision of further funding for progression of the A5 and A8 schemes, and in this regard will now provide £25 million per annum in 2015 and 2016 towards the projects. At the North South Ministerial Council Plenary (NSMC) Meeting held on 18 November 2011, the relevant Departments were tasked with preparing a new funding and implementation plan for the A5 and A8 projects to be agreed at the next NSMC Transport meeting, with endorsement at the next NSMC Plenary meeting.

This process is still on-going and has not yet reached a conclusion and in that regard, I have held discussions with the Minister of Finance and expect to have further discussions with Ministerial colleagues, with a view to reaching a conclusion as swiftly as possible. As Roads Minister, I am keen to give clarity to the Construction industry.

Park-and-ride Facilities: East Antrim

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development how many park and ride facilities there are in East Antrim.
(AQO 1125/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: There are currently six Park and Ride facilities in the East Antrim area.

These are located at:

- Whitehead Railway Station (49 spaces)
- Greenisland Railway Station (79 spaces)
- Whiteabbey Railway Station (75 spaces)
- Carrickfergus Railway Station (294 spaces)
- Larne Railway Station (62 spaces)
- Larne Bus Station (18 spaces)

Translink is also planning to start construction of a Park & Ride facility at Jordanstown railway station before the end of March 2012.

Winter Weather

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on his Department's arrangements with councils for dealing with problems caused by adverse winter weather conditions.
(AQO 1129/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am pleased that weather conditions during the winter period to date have been considerably more favourable than those we experienced during the last two winters. However, there can be no grounds for complacency and my Department's Roads Service remains alert to the possibility of the onset of more adverse weather conditions and is ready to respond quickly to ensure our main routes remain open for all road users. I would also strongly encourage motorists to exercise caution and drive with due care and attention and be mindful of the prevailing road conditions.

In relation to establishing arrangements with Councils for dealing with problems caused by adverse winter weather conditions, I am content that a large number of Councils have engaged at a local level and I would hope that as we move forward this good relationship can be further enhanced.

Transport: North Coast

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department has made every effort to avoid compulsory redundancies within Translink.
(AQO 1131/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink is required to operate commercially within the current difficult environment. Staffing levels is an operational matter for Translink management and I understand that Translink has been successful in avoiding compulsory redundancies despite implementing measures to improve efficiency in recent years.

I met with Translink recently to discuss their Corporate Plan for the next 3 years. This considers the cost pressures on Translink including wage and pension costs and planned level of fares. Translink confirmed that small reductions in staff numbers in recent years have been managed by voluntary redundancy or by redeployment. Future plans are still to be finalised but will require a balance to be struck between cost efficiency and will essentially be an issue for Translink management to negotiate with staff representative groups. I understand that every effort will be made to avoid compulsory redundancies going forward.

Roads: North Down

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposed construction of two roundabouts at the Craigantlet Crossroads and the junction of Whinney Hill and Ballymiscaw Road in North Down.
(AQO 1132/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that a planning application has been submitted for the proposed road improvement scheme. Details should be published in the normal manner, by the Planning Service, during early February 2012.

Roads Service officials have further advised that, while this project remains a high priority, the timescale for construction of this scheme will be dependent on the outcomes of the various statutory processes, land acquisition and the availability of the necessary finance.

Roads: Trans-European Transport Networks

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development what applications his Department is making for European funding for major Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T) capital roads projects.
(AQO 1133/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service directly contributes to the achievement of the NI Executive's Action Plan, to increase the number and value of NI projects securing funding from competitive EU funding programmes, by identifying potential projects that could benefit from TEN-T funding.

Whilst Roads Service currently has no applications with the TEN-T Agency, there has just been a 'call' for applications advertised under the 2012 Annual Programme. Roads Service officials will assess the focus of the call, to ascertain what applications may be submitted under this Programme.

A4: Signage

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his proposals to upgrade the traffic signage on the A4 dual carriageway to the same standard as that of a motorway.
(AQO 1134/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As you will recall, you wrote to me in December 2011, asking me to install motorway standard signage on the A4 dual carriageway. At that time, I advised that a Stage 4 Road Safety Audit, giving particular consideration to the need for further safety improvements and provision of wig-wag flashing lights at junctions along the new dual carriageway, was underway.

My Department's Roads Service has advised me that the audit has been completed.

The audit suggested that the issue of 'wrong-way-travelling' on the dual carriageway could be satisfactorily addressed through provision of additional signage, white lining and coning with the objective of preventing, or at least reducing, the number of incidences of 'wrong way' driving on the dual carriageway.

As I am sure you will agree, this is an extremely serious matter. Although additional 'No Entry' and 'Left Turn Only,' signage has been provided, some drivers are continuing to ignore the signs and are travelling along the A4 in the wrong direction. These actions are highly dangerous and could have grave consequences.

Through the issue of a Press Release and a number of media interviews, I have been highlighting the absolutely essential requirement for drivers to pay attention to roads signage at junctions when joining the new A4 dual carriageway. My Department's message is a clear one - drivers in the vicinity of the A4 must set aside their previous driving habits when using the new road layout, and should not rely on Sat Nav's that have not been updated to reflect changes to the layout. The simple rule we want road users to remember is: right turns onto the dual carriageway are prohibited at all junctions.

In addition, I can advise you that the audit also recommended that monitoring of the situation should continue and, if the suggested measures do not effectively address the issue, wig-wag flashing lights should be considered again on a junction by junction basis.

NI Water: Governance

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the governance of NI Water.
(AQO 1135/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have recently completed a number of briefings on governance issues with representatives from the water industry in Scotland, England, Wales and the Republic of Ireland. I plan to continue discussions with stakeholders over the coming weeks. It remains my aim to bring options to the Executive in the coming months in response to the Public Accounts Committee's recommendation that we should look at ways of providing more certainty of funding for NI Water.

Park-and-ride Facilities

Mr Cree asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline how he will improve park and ride facilities during this Assembly mandate.
(AQO 1136/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Last year my Department published a Strategic review of Park and Ride. That report highlighted the importance of Park and Ride in promoting sustainable transport. In addition it set out a number of recommendations and identified those strategic locations at which the development of Park and Ride should be prioritised as available funding permits. Implementation of the Review will take place at a time when budgets are under considerable pressure. However, recognising the significant contribution of Park and Ride to a more sustainable and efficient transport infrastructure I have set a clear commitment to expand the availability of park and ride during this Assembly mandate, including increasing provision for traffic entering the Belfast Metropolitan Area by 55% over 2010 levels.

In line with that commitment, capacity has already been increased at a number of sites on our strategic road and rail network across Northern Ireland with work also under way at a number of sites. In addition, officials from my Department, Roads Service and Translink also continue to work together to ensure a coordinated approach while finalising details of additional key schemes to be delivered in the current budgetary period.

Department for Social Development

Social Security Agency: Staff

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the religious background of staff working in the Social Security Agency, broken down by grade.
(AQW 5284/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): Recruitment and promotion exercises for General Service posts (i.e. administrators and managers) are managed on a corporate basis by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) through the HRConnect outsourced service. All Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) recruitment and promotion competitions are delivered in line with the Civil Service Commissioners' Recruitment Code and Commissioners regulate all recruitment to and within the NICS, at all levels, to ensure that the 'merit principle' is adhered to. DFP also provides statutory monitoring returns to the Equality Commission on its workforce composition for the NICS.

The religion of NICS staff is not held. However, as required by the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 (FETO), information is collected on the perceived community background of staff and applicants for posts in the NICS annually at the 1 January. Using this data for 2011, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) has provided the information requested, broken down by grade, in the table below.

Grade	Total Staffing Numbers	Protestant Numbers %		Roman Catholic Numbers %		Not Determined Numbers %	
Analogous G7 & above	38	18	47.4%	20	52.6%	0	0%
Deputy Principal	78	#		47	60.2%	*	
Staff Officer	215	#		114	53.0%	*	
Executive Officer I/ Executive Officer II	2032	809	39.8%	1199	59.0%	24	1.2%
Admin Officer	2608	1058	40.6%	1525	58.5%	25	0.9%
Admin Assistant	515	#		269	52.2%	#	
Total	**5486**	**2247**	**41.0%**	**3174**	**57.8%**	**65**	**1.2%**

Notes: All figures relate to permanent staff within the Social Security Agency and includes both full & part time staff i.e. headcount.

Source: Northern Ireland Statistical Research Agency (NISRA) - Extracted from HR Connect based on information relating to 1 January 2011

* Number of cases is too small to publish (below 10 in line with NISRA guidance).

\# Number has been suppressed to avoid disclosing another number that is too small to publish in line with * above.

Mortgage Interest Claims

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development what is the (i) target processing time; and (ii) average actual processing time for Support for Mortgage Interest applications.
(AQW 6144/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There is no specific target processing time for Mortgage Interest applications and the information requested is not therefore available.

Mortgage Interest Claims

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development how many Support for Mortgage Interest claims have been made in each of the last three years; and how many have been approved.
(AQW 6145/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Due to system limitations the information is not available in the format requested. The table below details the number of people who were receiving Support for Mortgage Interest by benefit at August in each of the last three years. There is no equivalent data available for Income-related Employment and Support Allowance.

Benefit	Aug-09	Aug-10	Aug-11
Jobseeker's Allowance	1,430	2,255	2,090
Pension Credit	5,600	5,800	5,520
Income Support	7,260	6,760	6,620
Total	**14,290**	**14,815**	**14,230**

Note. Data source Jobseeker's Allowance, Pension Credit and Income Support IFD scans August 2009, August 2010 and August 2011

Mortgage Interest Run On Applications

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development how many Mortgage Interest Run On applications have been received in each of the last three years; and how many have been approved.
(AQW 6146/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Customers do not need to make a written application for Mortgage Interest Run On and the Social Security Agency is not therefore required to make decisions on eligibility. An extra four weeks money is automatically paid if Income Support, Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance or Income-related Employment and Support Allowance has ceased because the customer or their partner is returning to full time employment or earning or working more hours. AQW 6145/11-15 details the number of customers receiving mortgage interest payments by benefit in August of each of the last three years..

Helm Housing: Appointment of Chief Executive

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the recruitment process for the appointment of the current Chief Executive of HELM Housing; (ii) how many people applied for the post; (iii) who was on the interview panel; and (iv) the terms and conditions relevant to the position.
(AQW 6237/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Given the significant failings within Helm the Department recognised that the Association needed a Chief Executive with specific knowledge, skills and expertise in managing troubled organisations. The Tenants Service Authority in England provided the Department with details of the arrangements they had in place to enable troubled associations to recruit such expertise. This information was passed to the Helm Board who used this process to appoint their current interim Chief Executive. The selection process is a matter for the Association.

Fuel Poverty

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the estimated number of families affected by fuel poverty in each of the last three years, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 6289/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested. The Housing Executive measures fuel poverty across all housing tenures through the House Condition Survey (HCS) which is carried out every two years. The results of the 2011 HCS are still being assessed and are not yet available. Therefore the last HCS for which results are available in the 2009 survey. Figures are also not available for the past three years. The 2009 HCS estimated that across Northern Ireland there were 302,310 households (44%) in fuel poverty. The Housing Executive breaks down fuel poverty by household size as shown in the figures below.

Household Size	**No**
Lone Adult	66,630
Two Adults	23,200
Small Family	21,490
Lone Parent	34,000
Large Family	10,130
Large Adult	10,520
Two Older	48,000
Lone Older	88,340
Total	**302,310**

The 2009 HCS reported figures based on the proposed new Council boundaries at that time under RPA. The table below outlines fuel poverty by proposed RPA area.

Proposed Council Location	**No**
Belfast	56,200
Londonderry/Strabane	23,080
Armagh & Bann	33,390
Lisburn/Castlereagh	27,680
Newry & Down	28,380
Antrim/N'Abbey	22,550
Causeway Coast	25,280
Ards & North Down	28,660
Fermanagh & Omagh	16,450
Mid Antrim	23,210
Mid Ulster	17,430
Total	**302,310**

Housing Executive Properties: Emergency Call-outs for Repairs

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of emergency call-outs for repairs to Housing Executive properties over the Christmas period in the North Down area.
(AQW 6304/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested. However during the period from 23 December 2011 to 2 January 2012 the Housing Executive received a total of 68 repair requests that were categorised as an emergency repair (Immediate Call Out) for their Bangor District Office area.

Disability Living Allowance: Appeals

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what measures he has put in place to deal with the volume of Disability Living Allowance appeals that might occur under the proposed Welfare Reform.
(AQW 6305/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Welfare Reform Bill currently progressing through the Westminster Parliament contains provisions which will see a new benefit - Personal Independence Payment, replace Disability Living Allowance for all new claims for working age claimants between 16 and 64 from April 2013. In addition, all existing Disability Living Allowance claimants aged between 16 and 64 will be reassessed for Personal Independence Payment between April 2013 and March 2016. Business as usual will continue to apply for new and existing Disability Living Allowance claimants who are under 16 and the current over-65 claimant caseload.

It is likely that the number of appeals will increase during the Personal Independence Payment reassessment period. The Department for Work and Pensions is currently working up projections on the numbers of appeals expected as a result of the introduction of the new benefit and a detailed appeals strategy paper for Great Britain is expected to be finalised by the end of February.

The Social Security Agency will be developing equivalent Northern Ireland forecasts and projections with regard to appeal volumes arising from the introduction of Personal Independence Payment and the reassessment of existing Working Age Disability Living Allowance recipients.

There is ongoing work and engagement with the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service regarding the impact of Personal Independence Payment Appeals and the Courts and Tribunal Service is represented on the Personal Independence Payment Project Board. The consequential impacts for Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service arising from this change will be included in the Personal Independence Payment Business Case which is expected to be finalised by May of this year.

DSD: Transfer of Functions to Local Government

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development, for each of the last five years, to detail the functions that (i) have been transferred; and (ii) are planned to be transferred from his Department to local councils, and of these, to detail (a) the reason behind the transfer of each function; (b) whether additional funding was offered to local councils to assist them in carrying out the functions; and (c) the cost, to his Department, of the final year when each of the functions were the responsibility of his Department; and (iii) may be transferred from his Department to local councils at a future date,
(AQW 6323/11-15)

Mr McCausland: No functions have been transferred from the Department for Social Development to local councils over the last five years.

Other than those functions which had originally been earmarked to transfer under the Reform of Public Administration proposals, no other functions were planned to transfer to councils. The DSD functions which had been earmarked to transfer from May 2011 were:

Urban Regeneration and Community Development Functions

- Tackling town and city regeneration (operational delivery of physical development projects including Comprehensive Development, Public Realm and Environmental Improvement Schemes;
- area-based regeneration including Neighbourhood Renewal; and
- Support for the voluntary and community sectors at local level e.g. the Community Support Programme and Community Investment Fund.

Housing Functions

- Regulation of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO)
- Housing Unfitness including repair and demolition notices;
- Living Over the Shops (LOTs); and
- Local Energy Conservation

As the overall list of functions to transfer to councils from central government was decided upon over 3 years ago it will be subject to review. Ultimately the Executive will decide the way forward and the package of functions to transfer.

Hospitality: Spend

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development what has been the total spend on hospitality by his Department in each of the last five years.
(AQW 6359/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The table below provides details of expenditure incurred on hospitality by the Department for Social Development in each of the last five years:

Department for Social Development £k

2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
51,790	56,605	125,822	74,567	25,036

Social Security Appeals

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the volume and technicality of information issued at Social Security appeals; and whether better use could be made of plain English.
(AQW 6381/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information provided by the Social Security Agency for Social Security Appeals Tribunals is in a format that meets the requirements of the Appeal Tribunals, which are independent of the Department for Social Development. The Agency uses plain English wherever possible and ensures that the volume of information provided is fit for purpose. However, it is the complexity of the different benefits and associated legislation, as well as the circumstances of individual cases that dictates the volume and/or technicality of information required.

The Appeals Service also issues documentation throughout the appeal process. In consultation with the Office of the President of Appeal Tribunals this material will be subject to continuous review of both the volume and technicality of information provided.

DSD: 0845 Numbers

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Social Development how much revenue has been raised by his Department in each of the last three financial years by the usage of 0845 numbers.
(AQW 6434/11-15)

Mr McCausland: This Department does not raise revenue from any of the 0845 numbers used.

Antisocial Behaviour

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many cases of anti-social behaviour were reported to the Housing Executive in 2011.
(AQW 6450/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not routinely collate this information by calendar year. However, the table below gives details of the number of anti social behaviour cases recorded in the financial year 2010/11 and also for the current year from April to December 2011.

	April 2010 to March 2011			**April 2011 to December 2011**	
District Office	**Recorded Cases**		**District Office**	**Recorded Cases**	
	Simple	**Complex**		**Simple**	**Complex**
North Belfast	162	108	North Belfast	119	6
South Belfast	213	17	South Belfast	213	0
East Belfast	87	5	East Belfast	65	12
West Belfast	293	35	West Belfast	190	25
Shankill	32	2	Shankill	27	1
Belfast Area Total	**787**	**167**	**Area Total**	**614**	**44**
Bangor	220	13	Bangor	175	5
Newtownards	172	16	Newtownards	159	12
Castlereagh	154	17	Castlereagh	67	3
Lisburn	207	9	Lisburn	169	13
Dairy Farm	106	2	Dairy Farm	114	2
Downpatrick	182	7	Downpatrick	125	5
S East Area Total	**1041**	**64**	**S East Area Total**	**809**	**40**
Banbridge	72	31	Banbridge	33	14
Newry	251	39	Newry	169	49
Armagh	95	25	Armagh	50	3
Lurgan	99	65	Lurgan	78	18
Portadown	58	29	Portadown	31	16

	April 2010 to March 2011			April 2011 to December 2011	
District Office	**Recorded Cases**		**District Office**	**Recorded Cases**	
	Simple	**Complex**		**Simple**	**Complex**
Dungannon	87	15	Dungannon	72	9
Fermanagh	170	63	Fermanagh	123	13
South Area Total	**832**	**267**	**South Area Total**	**556**	**122**
Ballymena	94	4	Ballymena	83	1
Antrim	158	15	Antrim	104	5
Newtownabbey 1	90	10	Newtownabbey 1	50	5
Newtownabbey 2	150	5	Newtownabbey 2	86	1
Carrickfergus	152	2	Carrickfergus	96	1
Larne	69	4	Larne	53	3
Ballycastle	24	3	Ballycastle	23	4
Ballymoney	48	9	Ballymoney	51	6
Coleraine	64	3	Coleraine	65	7
N East Area Total	**849**	**55**	**N East Area Total**	**611**	**33**
Waterloo	15	0	Waterloo	39	0
Waterside	51	7	Waterside	81	5
Collon Terrace	117	6	Collon Terrace	100	12
Limavady	67	18	Limavady	39	2
Magherafelt	44	4	Magherafelt	47	1
Strabane	116	5	Strabane	91	5
Omagh	84	7	Omagh	56	8
Cookstown	52	12	Cookstown	39	4
West Area Total	**546**	**59**	**West Area Total**	**492**	**37**
Grand Total	**4055**	**612**	**Total to date**	**3082**	**276**

A brief explanation of simple and complex cases is as follows:

Simple Cases

These cases generally reflect low level anti-social behaviour that can be resolved by the Housing Executive without the need for any inter-agency involvement. Examples of simple cases would be neighbour disputes over boundaries, noise, condition of gardens, pets, behaviour of children etc. Such cases take on average four to six weeks to resolve.

Complex Cases

These are cases which can take up to six months to resolve and can involve addressing alcohol/drug or mental health issues which are manifested in anti-social behaviour. These cases require detailed investigation and the involvement of other agencies (Social Services, Mental Health Teams, GPs, PSNI, local councils, Probation etc). Further examples would include lengthy patterns of anti-social activity, failure of early interventions to resolve issues, physical threats/ attacks etc. Complex cases can result in legal action being taken.

Trade Unions: Funding

Mr McCallister asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the level of funding his Department allocated to each trade union in the (i) 2000/01; (ii) 2005/06; and (iii) 2010/11 financial years.
(AQW 6469/11-15)

Mr McCausland: This Department provided funding to the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance in the three years requested as follows:

2000/01	2005/06	2010/11
£112,094	£135,465	£169,900

DSD: Civil Servants from the Foyle Constituency who Work in Greater Belfast

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the total number of civil servants in his Department who live in the Foyle constituency and travel to work in the Greater Belfast area; and the total cost to his Department for subsidising the travel.
(AQW 6473/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The total number of civil servants in the Department for Social Development who live in the Foyle constituency and travel to work in the Greater Belfast area is 46. During the period 1 January 2011 to 31 December 2011, 10 staff received support towards their travel to work costs through established policy and the total subsidised cost was £23,416.

Louisville Flats, Shaws Road, Belfast: Economy 7 Heating

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development how many complaints have been received from tenants of the Louisville Flats, Shaws Road, Belfast, in relation to Economy 7 heating, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6528/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has no record of formal complaints in relation to heating in the Louisville flats in the last three years. However, they have confirmed that in that time 22 repairs were carried out to the 16 flats owned by them.

Louisville Flats, Shaws Road, Belfast: Economy 7 Heating

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development whether there are any plans to replace the Economy 7 heating in the Louisville Flats, Shaws Road, Belfast.
(AQW 6529/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive is in the process of prioritising the heating replacement scheme for Louisville flats. This work will be carried out in the next 12 months subject to the necessary funding being available.

Louisville Flats, Shaws Road, Belfast: Windows

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development whether there are any plans to replace the windows in the Louisville Flats, Shaws Road, Belfast.
(AQW 6531/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It is anticipated that the window replacement scheme for Louisville flats will begin in February 2012.

Association of Independent Volunteer Centres

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development how funding for the Association of Independent Volunteer Centres will be allocated in the 2012/13 financial year.
(AQW 6561/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department is taking forward arrangements for the volunteering infrastructure model which will deliver Northern Ireland's first ever Volunteering Strategy. Having considered all reasonable options I have decided that the future volunteering infrastructure should comprise of a regional infrastructure partner and up to five local delivery partners who will be selected following an open and transparent commissioning process. Volunteering organisations, such as the Association of Independent Volunteer Centres can determine for themselves if they wish to tender for one or more of these opportunities. Commissioning is planned to be completed by summer 2012. Existing funding arrangements, which expire on 31 March 2012, will be extended to allow time for the commissioning process to be completed and will be consistent with Concordat principles. My officials met with representatives from the independent volunteer centres and Volunteer Now on 25 January2012 to update them on the new volunteering infrastructure arrangements and to explain the commissioning process.

Social and Affordable Homes

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to his commitment in the draft Programme for Government to deliver 8,000 social and affordable homes, to detail (i) the number of (a) social housing homes; and (b) affordable homes that will be delivered by 2014/15; (ii) the number of social housing homes that will be delivered in (a) 2012/13; (b) 2013/14; and (c) 2014/15, broken down by Housing Executive district office area; and (iii) the budget allocated to deliver social housing homes by 2014/15.
(AQW 6629/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested by the member is not currently available. The Housing Executive are currently finalising the Social Housing Development Programme for 2012-2015. I expect it to be with me for consideration by late February or early March and once approved it will be available on the Housing Executive website. (www.nihe.gov.uk)

As you are aware the Programme for Government contains a commitment to deliver 8,000 new social and affordable homes over the next four years and the Comprehensive Spending Review has already set aside over £564 million to deliver this objective.

Housing Executive Grants Scheme: Flooding

Mr Molloy asked the Minister for Social Development whether a grant is available, through the Housing Executive Grants Scheme, to assist owner occupiers to raise their houses to prevent recurrent flooding.
(AQW 6631/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Due to the current funding situation the Housing Executive can only award Discretionary Grants (ie Renovation, Replacement, Home Repair Assistance, Living Over The Shops, and Houses in Multiple Occupation Grants) in exceptional circumstances. Mandatory grants (ie Disabled Facilities Grants) are not affected.

A Discretionary Renovation Grant may be available in cases of Exceptional Circumstances if severe dampness was considered to be a serious and imminent risk to the occupants. The availability of this grant would also depend on the cause of the damp and the work required to resolve the problem.

Community Care Grants

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have received Community Care Grants in each of the last three years.
(AQW 6643/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The number of Community Care Grants awarded in the last three years is outlined in the table below. The Social Security Agency only records statistical information in relation to the overall number of Community Care Grant applications and subsequent awards made, but this is not routinely recorded by individual applicant. As a person can make multiple applications, it is not therefore possible to answer the question in the form requested.

Year	No. of Community Care Grants Awarded
2008/09	26,797
2009/10	24,936
2010/11	24,110

Housing Executive Properties: Heating

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development whether there are any circumstances which allow tenants in Housing Executive properties with oil-fired central heating to (i) have a working solid fuel fire; or (ii) re-open a previously blocked fire place.
(AQW 6740/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive recently announced a heating policy review which considered their approach to all heating systems and controls. Whilst the rising cost of oil and heating fuels were considered within the review, the Housing Executive concluded that the renewed use of redundant open fires would not be a viable option. There are environmental, maintenance and funding issues which would constrain such an approach. This decision was only taken after consideration of issues such as initial and regular maintenance costs, effectiveness, ease of use, health and safety and environmental/sustainability issues. However, this policy does not include properties that currently have an existing open fire. Where the Housing Executive is installing a new central heating system in properties with an existing open fire they will consider retaining the open fire where it is technically feasible.

The Housing Executive installs heating systems with high efficiency boilers and controls to prevent overheating to ensure that annual running costs continue to remain lower than for solid fuels. These central heating systems are suitable for all tenants including elderly as it is not necessary to carry solid fuels and are safer than open fires. The existing Housing Executive policy is also designed to reduce carbon emissions from their properties.

In December I announced an exciting and innovative pay-as-you-go option for oil heating for vulnerable households. The technology could see significant savings for those who use drums rather than have oil delivered in larger quantities. I expect the new technology to be installed in pilot homes in mid February.

Housing Executive: Rent

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development (i) for an estimate of the number of tenants who will be liable to pay full rental to the Housing Executive, once the recently announced rent increase is introduced; and (ii) what will be the average amount of rent.
(AQW 6803/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are currently 67,763 Housing Executive tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit, the remaining 19,229 tenants are required to pay full rental charge. The average Housing Executive rent will increase to £58.76 per week, excluding rates, with effect from 1 April 2012.

DSD: Legislative Programme

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 4123/11-15, when his Department will submit its legislative proposals to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.
(AQW 6814/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I have submitted my proposals for primary legislation to the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Rents for Small Businesses

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what action his Department is taking to encourage property owners to consider reducing their rents for small businesses that are struggling in the economic downturn.
(AQW 6830/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I assume the Member is referring to small businesses where the Housing Executive is the landlord. The Housing Executive has advised that their commercial property rents are based on the size and location of the property and rent reviews are carried out every five years or when a lease comes to an end and a new lease term is negotiated.

On occasion the Housing Executive has been approached by tenants requesting a rent reduction. These requests are treated on an individual basis. Where possible they will offer advice and assistance to the tenant to allow them to continue trading and to ensure the long term viability of the unit.

When a tenant makes a formal request for a rent reduction, the tenant is required to provide documentary evidence to support their request. This can be done by either providing an up to date copy of their trading accounts, or if they are not available, a statement from their accountant giving their assessment of the business. Any proposed reduction in rent must be approved by the Chief Executive's Business Committee. Rent reductions are generally offered for one year and are then reassessed to determine if the reduction should continue. The tenant will be required to provide an up to date set of accounts for reassessment.

Tenants' Rights

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the rights of a tenant; and (ii) the assistance available to a tenant, if their landlord's property is repossessed.
(AQW 6883/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

(i) Every tenant living in the private rented sector has the right to:

- a rent book which must be provided by the landlord free of charge;
- at least 4 weeks written notice to quit;
- due process of law; and
- freedom from harassment and illegal eviction.

If a tenancy commenced after 1 April 2007 a tenant has an additional right to receive a written statement of tenancy terms.

As well as the above, protected or statutory tenants have further protections in relation to greater security of tenure, succession rights and to have their rents controlled.

(ii) Where a landlord takes out a mortgage and makes the lender fully aware that a tenancy exists in the accommodation, or will exist, the general rule is that the lender will also be bound by the lease. This means that if the lender later gains possession of the property they will have to let the lease run on until the end of the contractual period and accept rent from the tenant.

Once a lender has obtained a possession order from the Courts he must apply to the Enforcement of Judgements Office to have it enforced. The Enforcement of Judgements Office has protocols in place which aim to keep tenants involved in cases of repossession.

If a landlord's property is repossessed a tenant should seek advice from a solicitor or advice agency.

Helm Housing: Land on the Ormeau Embankment

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the land purchased by Helm Housing on the Ormeau Embankment, to detail (i) when it purchased the land; and (ii) the date planning permission was granted, given that Helm Housing was suspended from the Social Housing Development Programme and not permitted to undertake any further development of new stock.
(AQW 6887/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Helm were not formally suspended until after approval to proceed with this site in question was granted. They were already contracted to the site when it was approved albeit the Department had previously considered the scheme and agreed it could proceed subject to a higher level of scrutiny and assurance to make sure it did not have any of the failings already identified from earlier developments elsewhere. That increased scrutiny will continue throughout the remaining development of this scheme.

Planning permission for the site was granted in November 2010 and Helm completed their acquisition and handed it over to their developer to commence work in March 2011. Their suspension did not formally start until April 2011.

Housing Strategy

Ms Ritchie asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 4851/11-15, when the Housing Strategy will be published; and what will be its main elements.
(AQW 6891/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I have met a number of times with officials in my Department to discuss the need for a Housing Strategy for Northern Ireland. This is currently being developed and I hope to publish this around April 2012.

Employment and Support Allowance: Work Capability Assessment

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Social Development how many Employment and Support Allowance claimants have failed the Work Capability Assessment, since ATOS Origin began conducting the assessments.
(AQO 1144/11-15)

Mr McCausland: 12,578 customers have completed the Work Capability Assessment since Atos Healthcare was appointed on 20 June 2011.

The decision on whether or not a customer is to be disallowed ESA is the responsibility of a Social Security Agency Decision Maker. It is not possible to provide detail on outcomes from the assessments as it is not held in the form requested.

Housing: Monkstown Estate

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Social Development what maintenance projects are planned for the Monkstown Estate in 2012.
(AQO 1141/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are two planned maintenance schemes for the Monkstown estates in the Housing Executive's 2012/13 programme:-

- Grange/Mossley/Monkstown External Cyclical Maintenance – 130 dwellings

  External Cyclical Maintenance programmes ensure that the external fabric of homes is upgraded to meet modern day standards. For example, repairs to roofs, chimneys, porches, external doors and walls, repairs and servicing of windows, replacement of individual external doors and windows where required, repair or replacement of rainwater goods as necessary and external redecoration.
- Monkstown kitchen replacements – 131 dwellings

Glengormley Town Centre

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the implementation of the Glengormley Town Centre Master Plan.
(AQO 1146/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Newtownabbey masterplan incorporates a regeneration strategy for Glengormley. It was finalised and launched in March 2011 and identifies a range of regeneration projects in the centre of Glengormley over the next fifteen years.

A regeneration strategy implementation team made up of the main public and private sector stakeholders in the town and my own Department is working effectively to deliver a number of projects. The work completed to date includes a shopfront repainting scheme and implementing a one-way traffic system with designated parking bays in Portland Avenue. Other regeneration works planned this year include a £600,000 public realm improvements scheme for Portland Avenue and a revitalisation programme to improve the appearance of the town. In addition some further analysis work is required to help inform what measures may be required to mitigate traffic congestion and provide additional car parking. A transport study is planned to commence later this year and will be used to examine the likely long term impact other potential major developments identified in the Strategy will have on future traffic flows in Glengormley.

Housing Benefit: Private Rented Sector

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of whether the changes to housing benefit will create further problems for tenants who are renting in the private sector.
(AQO 1147/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Changes to housing benefit in respect of the private rented sector are intended to manage expenditure and provide a fairer scheme by taking steps to ensure that people on benefit are not living in accommodation that would be out of reach of many people in work and to begin to deal with the disincentives to work in the current system. Some measures have already been introduced and other proposals will be taken forward in a Welfare Reform Bill.

Local housing allowance is the present means of determining the amount of housing benefit for rent which is payable to private rented sector tenants. Most local housing allowance cases will be affected by the changes which were announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Emergency Budget 2010 and the Spending Review 2010 and which will apply across the United Kingdom.

While some of the changes, such as the caps on each property size, will have a significant impact on high rent areas in Great Britain, the amounts specified will not impact on claimants in Northern Ireland.

Before the change to the method of calculating the weekly rate of local housing allowance, at least 50 per cent of private sector properties were available to people in receipt of housing benefit. It is estimated that the change will mean that at least 30 per cent of such properties will be available to housing benefit claimants. This reflects the constraint and the choice that many people in low-paid jobs already take. The average weekly reduction is about £7.50.

The Budget 2010 changes came into effect for new claims from April 2011 and will gradually take effect for about 45,000 existing claims. For existing claimants there is up to 9 months' transitional protection, in practice meaning many existing claimants are not affected until January 2012 and some will not be affected until December 2012.

The Spending Review 2010 change, which increased the age threshold for the shared accommodation rate, came into effect for new claims from January 2012 and could affect about 6,000 existing claims. For existing claimants this change will take affect at the same time as the Budget 2010 changes and the average overall weekly reduction is about £32.

It may become more difficult for some housing benefit claimants to find or maintain suitable accommodation, because the overall number of properties financially available will be reduced. However, around a third of properties will still be affordable to Housing Benefit claimants and the 9 months' transitional protection allows existing claimants further time to consider their housing options. The discretionary housing payments budget has received significant additional funding to meet increased requests for help for further financial assistance on top of housing benefit.

Housing Associations

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development whether he is considering carrying out a review of Housing Associations.
(AQO 1148/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As landlords of around 30,000 homes and developers of all new social homes, housing associations make a significant contribution here. Given this role and recent failings in some quarters, I believe it is appropriate to review the movement and will set out details in the coming months.

Neighbourhood Renewal: Omagh and Strabane

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the number and range of Neighbourhood Renewal projects that have been delivered in the Omagh and Strabane districts over the last four years.
(AQO 1149/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department has been working with the Omagh and Strabane Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships to deliver a range of projects which have been identified as priorities for the Neighbourhood Renewal Areas in those towns. The range of projects includes health, education, community development, economic development and environmental improvement schemes.

In total, my Department has provided funding to 51 projects worth a total of £3,262,190.90 over the last four years in the Omagh Neighbourhood Renewal Area and 27 projects worth a total of £3,076,608.97 in Strabane NRA over the same period. Details of the projects are provided in the attached tables.

Neighbourhood Renewal projects in Omagh District

Equipment for MACCA	£1,074.00
Riverside Cycle Path	£74,185.98
Strathroy After School Club	£22,850.04
Strathroy After School And Homework Club - Continuation	£19,968.00
Strathroy Homework & Afterschools Club - Continuation - 11/14	£98,870.43
Omagh Area- Health And Wellbeing Project Phase I	£4,171.86
Omagh Area- Health And Wellbeing Project Phase II	£14,953.00
Environmental Improvements - Strathroy	£174,318.30

Disabled access at Multi-sport at Strathroy	£2,000.00
Support for After Schools Club at Strathroy	£26,500.00
Strathroy Enclosed Play Area	£26,800.00
Community Development For O'Kane Park	£19,731.40
Enniskillen & Omagh Health & Well Being Project Phase I	£14,953.00
Upgrade to play area at Campsie	£37,111.82
Railings at Campsie	£24,420.00
Refurbishment to Omagh British Legion at Campsie	£16,450.00
Personal Alarms at Gallows Hill, Johnston Park & Campsie	£11,300.00
Personal Alarms at O'Kane Park	£12,430.00
Personal Alarms at Strathroy	£14,690.00
O'Kane Park Neighbourhood Renewal Scheme - Footpaths and lighting	£37,500.00
Enjoying Learning And Achieving In Omagh	£14,944.00
Education Phase II 2008 - 2009 Homework Clubs	£124,264.62
Health & Wellbeing Programme In The Omagh NRA Phase 3 - Activities	£33,896.00
MACCA - Social Economy - Recommendations on Business Proposals	£7,100.00
Mullaghmore Environmental Improvement Scheme	£221,000.00
Omagh Female Alcohol Support - Health Project	£47,475.00
Omagh Female Alcohol Support Health Project - Continuation	£61,254.00
Omagh District Training Consortium- Inspiration For Life	£28,540.00
Omagh Education Mentor	£87,817.00
Omagh Education Mentor 11/14	£150,836.00
Outdoor Sensory Garden	£31,423.75
Environmental Improvements within the NRA	£12,000.00
Refurbishment of Omagh's Women's Refuge and Helping Hand Programme For Children From the Lammy Area	£19,937.00
Community Action Plan, Refurbishment of Community Venue and Youth Services Training for Lammy Omagh	£12,211.89
Minor Environmental Improvements and Upgrade of Street Lighting in Strathroy	£170,000.00
Street lighting and associated footway resurfacing in Strathroy Phase 2	£124,000.00
Community Development Worker for Mullaghmore	£68,787.75
Promotion of Social Economy and Employment Prospects in Omagh area	£64,282.03
Omagh NRA TA & Employment of co-ordinator	£30,269.64
Health & Wellbeing in Omagh NR - Continuation	£151,512.00
CKS New Community Centre	£475,845.00
Refurbishment of Gallows Hill Community House	£8,518.89
Exploring Enterprise Programme Omagh	£29,187.00
Mullaghmore EI - Upgrade Street Lighting	£30,539.00
MACCA Eco Centre	£125,167.50

EI Improvements to Roads, Footways & Street Lighting - Mullaghmore	£60,600.00
Strathroy Enclosed Play Area phase 2	£16,900.00
MACCA Resource Centre (Rebrand)	£4,500.00
O'Kane Park Environmental Improvements 10/11	£8,862.00
Omagh Health Project 2011- 2014	£322,643.00
O'Kane Park and Gallows Hill Environmental Improvements	£63,600.00
Total Expenditure	**£3,262,190.90**

Neighbourhood Renewal projects in the Strabane District

Strabane Ethnic Community Association - Ethnic CD Worker Salary & Running Costs	£174,284.41
Lisnafin/Ardanlee CDA - Project Co-ordinator Salary & Running Costs	£142,341.68
Springhill Park CDA - Regeneration Project-	£280.204.74
Strabane Sigerson's GAA- Project Co-ordinator	£239,377.56
DRD Roads Service- EI Scheme 2	£200,000.00
ELB - Youth Intervention & Graffiti Art Programme	£6,754.00
Strabane Community Project - Salaries Full-Time Project Co-ordinator & Part-Time Finance/Admin worker	£71,587.33
Melmount EBE Community Association Forum - Uniting Communities	£106,611.43
HURT (Have Your Tomorrows) -	£31,010.55
Strabane Chamber of Commerce - Christmas Star Campaign	£10,000.00
Strabane District Council - Sustaining Physical Activity & Improving Wellbeing	£32,768.98
Fountain St Community Development Association - Head of the Town Rejuvenation Project	£96,685.22
Strabane 2000 - Strabane Bridge Economic Appraisal	£5,477.45
Strabane LGBT Group - Strabane LBGT Inclusion Project	£95,852.45
Strabane & District CAB - NR Benefit Uptake Project	£17,117.32
DRD Roads Service - EI Scheme	£73,025.00
Foyle Women's Aid- Rapid Response	£51,954.92
NW Play Resource Centre - Learning Through Arts	£81,379.56
Strabane 2000 Bridge Project (Capital)	£97,031.50
Strabane District Council Youth Multi Game Area (Capital)	£134,688.10
Strabane District Council Play park – Springhill Park (Capital)	£55,752.00
Strabane District Council Melvin Sports Hall (Capital)	£54,000.00
DRD Roads Service - E1 Scheme	£500,000.00
DSD Housing NIHE - Supply and installation of play equipment (TT)	£5,609.00
DSD Road Service- EI Scheme (TT)	£158,200.00
Strabane District CAB- Nr Benefits Update project (TT)	£83,535.88
Strabane LSP - Technical Assistance	£271,359.89
Total Expenditure	**£3,076,608.97**

Employment and Support Allowance: Work Capability Assessment

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Social Development how many Work Capability Assessments have been carried out since their introduction.
(AQO 1150/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I refer the member to the written answer given to AQW 5556/11-15 by Mark Durkan on 23 December 2011 and the written answer given to AQW 5881/11-15 by Michael Copeland on 10 January 2012.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Inventory of Works of Art

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission to publish an inventory of works of art which it holds identifying those items on display, and the location of those items that are not on display.
(AQW 6192/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): I can confirm that the following works of art are held by the Assembly:

Description	Current Location
Portrait of Rt. Hon JM Andrews by F McKelvey	Currently in offsite storage
Portrait of Rt. Hon, Sir Basil Brooke Bart Prime Minister for N.I 1943-63	On long term loan to Viscount Brookeborough
Portrait of Viscount Craigavon by N Becher	Currently in offsite storage
Portrait of Sir Henry Wilson by HW Gates	Currently in offsite storage
Portrait of Lord Armaghdale by Riviere	Currently in offsite storage
Portrait of Frederick Temple by C Williams	Currently in offsite storage
Portrait of HM the Queen by Lydia de Burgh	On loan to Hillsborough Castle
State opening of N.I Parliament (small version) by William Conor	On display in Room 41
State opening of NI. Parliament (large version) by William Conor	On display in the Senate Chamber
William III, The Duke of Schomberg and the Pope by Pieter Van der Meulen	On display in Room 40
Oil painting, an Obelisk at the Boyne by J Tudor	Currently in storage at Parliament Buildings
Print of Sydenham, Belmont & surrounding area	Currently in offsite storage
Print showing service for Queen Victoria's Jubilee	Currently in offsite storage
Photograph of Queen Victoria	Currently in storage
Print of Irish House of Commons	On display in Room 40
Large framed display of Historic Parliamentary Occasions 1945	Currently in offsite storage
Collection of framed photographs of former Speakers of the NI House of Commons	On display outside the Senate Chamber and Room 41
Framed sealed indenture of Stormont Estate	Currently in offsite storage
Collection of miscellaneous photographs of Parliament Buildings and historic events therein	Currently in offsite storage
Portrait of Mr Seamus Mallon MP by Rita Duffy (unveiled 25 March 2003).	On display on the 1st Floor
"The Assembly in Session" by Noel Murphy February 2003	On display in Room 41
"The House will divide" by Noel Murphy (unveiled 10th February 2003).	On display in the Senate Chamber

Description	Current Location
Portrait of Lord Alderdice by Carol Graham (unveiled on 11 March 2005).	On display in the Members Dining Room
Portrait of The Lord Bannside by David Nolan (unveiled 28th June 2010).	On display on the 1st Floor
46 Rowel Frier's drawings of Members of the Northern Ireland Parliament 1972	On display in the Members coffee lounge
Portrait of Eileen Bell by Conor Walton, oil on canvas (unveiled on 28th November 2011).	On display in the Members Dining Room.

Pension Contributions from MLAs

Mr Agnew asked the Assembly Commission what measures are in place to ensure that the pension contributions from MLAs are invested ethically.
(AQW 6197/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Members Pension Scheme (Northern Ireland) is a trust-based occupational pension scheme. Five Members are appointed by resolution of the Assembly to act as Trustees. The Trustees are responsible for administering the Pension Fund in accordance with the scheme rules, the law as it relates to pensions, tax and trust matters and regulatory guidance. The Trustees appoint an Investment Manager to invest the pension fund on their behalf and in accordance with the Statement of Investment Principles. The Statement of Investment Principles is a matter for the Pension Trustees.

Presidential Election Campaign: Wages

Mrs D Kelly asked the Assembly Commission (i) whether the deputy First Minister received a wage from the Assembly during his presidential election campaign; (ii) whether John O'Dowd MLA, as Acting deputy First Minister, received an additional wage during this time, and if so, whether this was in addition to, or in place of, his MInisterial salary.
(AQW 6388/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The current provisions for Members' and Office Holders salaries are set out in the Northern Ireland Assembly (Members' Salaries) Determination 2000. Section 16A (11) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (the Act) makes provision for the First Minister or deputy First Minister to designate another Minister to exercise his or her functions in certain prescribed circumstances.

Should the First Minister or deputy First Minister choose to avail of the provisions of Section 16A (11) of the Act, the salaries due for each substantive Office held will remain payable i.e. the First Minister or deputy First Minister will continued to receive his or her Office Holder salary and the Minister will continue to receive his or her Ministerial salary.

However, AQW 2805/11-15 noted that the deputy First Minister notified the Assembly Commission that he did not wish to receive either his Member or Office Holder salary from 20 September 2011. Consequently, no salary was paid from that date until the end of the Presidential election campaign.

Members' salary payments are published annually as required by Standing Order 76 (2). Where an individual Member or Officeholder has voluntarily chosen to receive a reduced salary, this information is also published.

Obelisk Marking the Hillsborough Agreement

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission what was the cost of the obelisk marking the Hillsborough Agreement which has been placed in the Members' Lobby of Parliament Buildings; why the obelisk was considered necessary, and why it was placed in the Members' Lobby.
(AQW 6688/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The sculpture "Agreement" was not commissioned by the Assembly. It was gifted to the Assembly at no cost by local artist, Margaret M Madden. The sculpture was unveiled on 25 January 2011 in the Senate Rotunda and has been on display for the past year. The sculpture was moved to the Assembly Rotunda as it relates to the current Assembly. As with many of the features in the building, and other items on display, no mention of the sculpture is included in the official tour script.

Revised Written Answers

This section contains the revised written answers to questions tabled by Members. The content of the responses is as received at the time from the relevant Minister or representative of the Assembly Commission, and it has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process or changed.

Revised Written Answers

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Sports Projects: North Down

In Bound Volume 69, page WA142, replace the answer to question (AQW 4927/11-15) asked by Mr Weir with:

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Sport NI is the lead development agency for sport in the north of Ireland with responsibility for the distribution of exchequer funding. Sport NI has earmarked £11,232,303 in the 2011-15 budgetary period for sporting projects in the North Down area. A breakdown of this figure is provided below:

Programme	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	Totals
50m Pool	£7,000,000	£3,843,834	£385,137	-	£11,228,971
Awards for Sport	£3,332	-	-	-	£3,332
Totals	**£7,003,332**	**£3,843,834**	**£385,137**	**-**	**£11,232,303**

Furthermore, Sport NI has allocated a budget of £10.25m for its Community Capital Programme during the current CSR period. A total of 141 applications for funding were received under this programme, three of which are from the North Down area. Applications under this programme are currently being considered by Sport NI.

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Intensive Care Ventilators

In Bound Volume 69, page WA239, replace the answer to question (AQW 4461/11-15) asked by Mr McClarty with:

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Ten paediatric intensive care ventilators purchased as part of the preparation to meet expected additional surge capacity during the 2009 H1N1 pandemic were returned to the manufacturer on 29 September 2011. This was part of a buy-back option negotiated with the manufacturer and the process for recouping the sum of £84,280 (plus VAT) has been instigated by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

One hundred intensive care ventilators (plus associated equipment) were purchased between 1 April and 31 December 2009 at a total cost of £4.3m. Of these, 13 were purchased as direct replacements of older stock; 87 were purchased as additional stock to enable Trusts to expand their critical care capacity to meet the demands of the pandemic at that time, but also to enhance capacity to meet other surge demands such as annual winter pressures.

Eleven paediatric intensive care ventilators have not been used to date but remain available for use by Trusts to meet any future surge demands. A breakdown of information by Trust area is outlined in the table below.

Table: Number of intensive care ventilators purchased between 1 April and 31 December 2011, broken down by Trust area

Trust	Number of intensive care ventilators purchased between 1 Apr. and 31 Dec. 2009	Were these purchased as		How many ventilators remained unused between 31 Dec. 2010 and 31 Oct. 2011?
		direct replacements of existing stock?	additional stock?	
BHSCT Adult	18	-	18	0
Paeds	21*	1	20	6
Neonatal	6	-	6	0
NHSCT Adult	7	-	7	0
Paeds	2	-	2	2
Neonatal	2	-	2	0
SEHSCT Adults	16	12	4	0

Trust	Number of intensive care ventilators purchased between 1 Apr. and 31 Dec. 2009	Were these purchased as		How many ventilators remained unused between 31 Dec. 2010 and 31 Oct. 2011?
		direct replacements of existing stock?	additional stock?	
Paeds	4	-	4	0
Neonatal	3	-	3	0
SHSCT Adult	4	-	4	0
Paeds	8	-	8	0
Neonatal	3	-	3	0
WHSCT Adult	2	-	2	0
Paeds	3	-	3	3
Neonatal	1	-	1	0
Totals	**100**	**13**	**87**	**11**

* 10 of these paediatric intensive care ventilators were placed in sealed storage and returned as part of the buy-back option which was exercised in Sept. 2011

Intensive Care Ventilators

In Bound Volume 69, page WA240, replace the answer to question (AQW 4463/11-15) asked by Mr McClarty with:

Mr Poots: Ten paediatric intensive care ventilators purchased as part of the preparation to meet expected additional surge capacity during the 2009 H1N1 pandemic were returned to the manufacturer on 29 September 2011. This was part of a buy-back option negotiated with the manufacturer and the process for recouping the sum of £84,280 (plus VAT) has been instigated by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

One hundred intensive care ventilators (plus associated equipment) were purchased between 1 April and 31 December 2009 at a total cost of £4.3m. Of these, 13 were purchased as direct replacements of older stock; 87 were purchased as additional stock to enable Trusts to expand their critical care capacity to meet the demands of the pandemic at that time, but also to enhance capacity to meet other surge demands such as annual winter pressures.

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BHSCT Adult	18	-	18	0
Paeds	21*	1	20	6
Neonatal	6	-	6	0
NHSCT Adult	7	-	7	0
Paeds	2	-	2	2
Neonatal	2	-	2	0
SEHSCT Adults	16	12	4	0
Paeds	4	-	4	0
Neonatal	3	-	3	0
SHSCT Adult	4	-	4	0
Paeds	8	-	8	0

Trust	Number of intensive care ventilators purchased between 1 Apr. and 31 Dec. 2009	Were these purchased as		How many ventilators remained unused between 31 Dec. 2010 and 31 Oct. 2011?
		direct replacements of existing stock?	additional stock?	
Neonatal	3	-	3	0
WHSCT Adult	2	-	2	0
Paeds	3	-	3	3
Neonatal	1	-	1	0
Totals	**100**	**13**	**87**	**11**

* 10 of these paediatric intensive care ventilators were placed in sealed storage and returned as part of the buy-back option which was exercised in Sept. 2011

Registered Blind or partially Sighted

In Bound Volume 69, page WA204, replace the answer to question (AQW 2741/11-15) asked by Mr Beggs with:

Mr Poots: Information on the number of people registered as blind or partially sighted is not collected centrally, but is recorded by each Health & Social Care (HSC) Trust. The information provided by the five HSC Trusts is detailed in the table below.

Number of Adults and Young People Registered Blind or Partially Sighted in each HSC Trust at 3 October 2011 [1]

HSC Trust	Persons Registered Blind or Partially Sighted	
	(i) Adults (Aged 19+)	(ii) Young People (Aged 0-18)
Belfast	1,939	19
Northern	1,387	63
South Eastern	1,075	21
Southern	1,440	111
Western	753	51
Northern Ireland	**6,594**	**265**

1 The information recorded by HSC Trusts is not a register of all blind or partially sighted people as some may refuse to have their names added to relevant HSC Trust records.

Justice

Court Cases

in this Bound Volume, page WA240, replace the answer to question (AQW 5782/11-15) asked by Mr Weir with:

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The table below sets out the number of cases processed at each court office and in the Civil Processing Centre across all business areas.

Processing office [1]	Cases Dealt With [2]					
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	**Total**
Antrim	2622	2966	2606	2901	3257	**14352**
Ballymena	4338	4728	4343	4180	3448	**21037**
Coleraine	4730	4408	3739	3784	3852	**20513**
Larne	1233	1001	925	896	757	**4812**
Bangor	2557	2298	2115	1795	1846	**10611**

Processing office [1]	Cases Dealt With [2]					
Downpatrick	3330	2957	2689	2407	2315	**13698**
Newtownards	5402	5575	5431	5620	6317	**28345**
Armagh	2320	1947	2086	2249	2098	**10700**
Banbridge [3]	1627	1300	1180	1539	1274	**6920**
Newry	4850	5103	5490	5456	5705	**26604**
Belfast	27354	24745	23322	23547	25283	**124251**
Craigavon	4912	4751	4823	4450	5180	**24116**
Lisburn	4163	4260	3859	4379	4472	**21133**
Dungannon	5477	4765	4404	4686	4415	**23747**
Enniskillen	2801	2110	1986	2314	2542	**11753**
Omagh	4060	3789	3561	3485	3617	**18512**
Strabane	2082	1450	1165	1353	1226	**7276**
Limavady	1460	1425	1190	1363	1109	**6547**
Londonderry	7675	7065	5745	6701	6325	**33511**
Magherafelt	1282	1149	1146	1211	1204	**5992**
Civil Processing Centre	8270	11012	11464	12665	12475	**55886**
High Court	20752	20022	24365	20992	22965	**109096**
Total	**123297**	**118826**	**117634**	**117973**	**121682**	**599412**

[1] Court offices based on the processing office as recorded on ICOS for 2007-2010. In 2006 Crown Court, Magistrates' Court, family and Children Order business were recorded on manual forms and reflect the court office which disposed of/ dealt with the case. The Civil Processing Centre is a centralised office for small claims and civil bill business. Cases may relate to any County Court division but be processed there. In 2006 civil County Court business was recorded on ICOS and therefore the court offices are based on the processing office as recorded on that system. A case may be processed at one venue and heard at another.

[2] Cases dealt with are based on criminal defendants, civil and family cases, Children Order cases and applications disposed of. Debt cases in the Magistrates' Court (from 2007 onwards) and licensing in the Magistrates' and County Court are excluded as these numbers are held manually and not centrally collated.

[3] Banbridge cases are processed and heard at Newry Courthouse.

Regional Development

Shared Future

In this Bound Volume, page WA103, replace the answer to question (AQW 5243/11-15) asked by Mr Lyttle with:

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development):

(i) Under the Northern Ireland Act 1998, all departments are required to fulfil the statutory duty to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

My Department's work on the Regional Development Strategy and Regional Transportation Strategy will connect and support communities, strengthen community cohesion and promote city and town centres as shared spaces. The plans for a phased re-lay of the Coleraine to Londonderry Rail link and the Rapid Transit pilot network proposals which I announced in October will also assist in promoting a shared future. In addition, Roads Service assists other agencies and communities to deal with flags, graffiti and illegal monuments in ways designed to best promote good relations.

(ii) As part of their obligations under the Act all departments are required to consider how all policy development and spending decisions contribute to promoting good relations. The approach to maintaining good relations considerations into policy development and resource allocation will also be considered as part of the development of the final Cohesion, Sharing and Integration strategy.

Social Development

Incapacity Benefit and Employment and Support Allowance

In Bound Volume 68, page WA119, replace the answer to question (AQW 3557/11-15) asked by Mr Molloy with:

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): An estimated 76,000 Incapacity Benefit customers will go through the reassessment process and be required to undertake a work capability assessment during the 3 year period to 5 April 2014. This figure does not include an estimated 10,5401 Incapacity Benefit customers who are due to reach State Pension Age before 6 April 2014, and are therefore exempt from the reassessment process.

The other information you requested is set out in the table below:

	Number of customers
Failed the Work Capability Assessment	4382
Placed in the Work Related Activity Group	6683
Placed in the Support Group	5343

1. Sourced from Incapacity Benefit MIDAS scan February 2011. Please note this figure may differ from forthcoming published National Statistics.
2. Sourced from the Business Objects data as at 30 September 2011.
3. Sourced from the Jobseekers Allowance Payment System data as at 30 September 2011.

Work Capability Assessment

In Bound Volume 69, WA421, replace the answer to question (AQW 5384/11-15) asked by Mr Durkan with:

Mr McCausland: All Employment and Support Allowance customers are subject to the Work Capability Assessment process which includes completing a limited capability for work medical questionnaire and in most cases attending a medical examination. The Work Capability Assessment was developed in consultation with medical experts and a range of other customer representative groups to ensure that it is an accurate assessment of an individual's capability for work. The assessment looks at the functional effects of an individual's condition, rather than the condition itself. It is worth noting that Employment and Support Allowance has 7 mental health descriptors and 10 physical descriptors.

The role of the examining healthcare professional is to prepare a report for Employment and Support Allowance based on their independent and impartial medical assessment of the customer's ability to perform activities within each of the functional areas, by identifying the descriptors that they consider appropriate. This is based on their clinical assessment of the customer, which may include a relevant physical examination, interview and observation. The approved healthcare professional will also consider the effects of the condition on the claimant for the majority of the time, so that the opinion will not be based on a snapshot of their condition on the day of the medical assessment. A Social Security Agency Decision Maker will consider any evidence provided by the healthcare professional as well as the information provided in the limited capability for work medical questionnaire to determine if the Work Capability Assessment has been satisfied.

The approved healthcare professional's task of considering the effects of a condition is different from that of a GP needing to make a diagnosis and plan treatment. The interview and assessment may therefore be different from that which a claimant might expect from their GP. Any evidence provided by a customer's GP or consultant is very important and fully considered, and processes are in place to ensure it can be requested when it will help provide advice on benefit entitlement. However, although the claimant's health condition or the GP/Consultant's diagnosis is not being disputed, GPs are unlikely to have the knowledge of the benefit system or disability analysis to provide the decision-maker with comprehensive information about the functional effects in relation to work capability.

My Department will continue to review the Work Capability Assessment and to make changes where necessary to ensure that our high standards of support continue.

Official Report (Hansard)

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Journal of Proceedings

Minutes of Proceedings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 16 January 2012

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Statement – December EU Fisheries Council meeting

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill, made a statement regarding the outcome of the December EU Fisheries Council meeting, held on 15 and 16 December 2011, following which she replied to questions.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

2.2 Statement - Inspection of Helm Housing

The Minister for Social Development, Mr Nelson McCausland, made a statement regarding the Inspection of Helm Housing, following which he replied to questions.

2.3 Statement - Payment of Subcontractors

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, made a statement regarding the Payment of Subcontractors, following which he replied to questions.

2.4 First Stage - Rates (Amendment) Bill (NIA 2/11-15)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, introduced a Bill to amend the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

2.5 Motion - The Insolvency (Fees) (Amendment No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011

Proposed:

That the Insolvency (Fees) (Amendment No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 be affirmed.

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

2.6 Motion - Take Note Debate - Review of Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland

Proposed:

That this Assembly takes note of the Review of Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland published on 13 December 2011.

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Debate ensued.

The Speaker took the Chair.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

3. Question Time

3.1 Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster.

3.2 Environment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of the Environment, Mr Alex Attwood.

4. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

4.1 Motion - Take Note Debate - Review of Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

5. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.26pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

16 January 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on
14 December 2011 - 16 January 2012

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

- Rates (Amendment) Bill (NIA Bill 2/11-15)

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

- Livestock and Meat Commission for Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2011 (DARD)
- The Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2011 (OFMDFM)
- South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust Charitable Trust Fund Annual Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2011 (DHSSPS)
- Northern Ireland Law Commission Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2011 (DOJ)
- Waterways Ireland Annual Report 2010 (DCAL)
- North Eastern Education and Library Board Annual Report and Accounts 2010/2011 (DE)
- Minerals Annual Statement 2007-2008 (DETI)
- Minerals Annual Statement 2008-2009 (DETI)
- Minerals Annual Statement 2009-2010 (DETI)
- Commission for Victims and Survivors Annual Report and Accounts for year ended 31 March 2011 (OFMDFM)
- Belfast Metropolitan College Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2011 (DEL)
- Northern Regional College Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2011 (DEL)
- North West Regional College Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2011 (DEL)
- South Eastern Regional College Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2011 (DEL)
- Southern Regional College Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2011 (DEL)
- South West College Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2011 (DEL)
- Libraries NI Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2011 (DCAL)

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

(The Department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

- S.R. 2011/419 The Less Favoured Area Compensatory Allowances Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DARD)
- S.R 2011/427 The Employer's Liability (Compulsory Insurance) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DETI)
- S.R 2011/428 The Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Reviews of Sentencing) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOJ)
- S.R. 2011/431 The Social Security (Electronic Communications) (No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DSD)

- S.R 2011/432 The Motor Vehicles (Access to Driver Licensing Records) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOE)
- S.R. 2011/434 The Social Security (Contribution Conditions for Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DSD)
- S.R. 2011/435 The Northern Ireland Poultry Health Assurance Scheme (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DARD)
- S.R. 2011/436 The Northern Ireland Poultry Health Assurance Scheme Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DARD)
- S.R. 2011/437 The Zoonoses (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DARD)
- S.R. 2011/438 The Trade in Animals and Related Products Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DARD)
- S.R. 2011/440 The Non-Commercial Movement of Pet Animals Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DARD)
- S.R 2012/1 The Occupational Pension Schemes (Employers Debt and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
- S.R. 2012/3 The Specified Products from China (Restriction on First Placing on the Market) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)
- Draft S.R. 2012 The Sunbeds (Fixed Penalty) (Amount) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)
- Draft S.R 2012 The Pharmacy (1976 Order) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)

For Information Only:

- S.R. 2011/406 (C.29) The Education (2006 Order) (Commencement No.3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DE)
- S.R. 2011/409 (C.30) The Damages (Asbestos-related Conditions) (2011 Act) (Commencement) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DFP)
- S.R. 2011/411 The Labour Relations Agency (Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures) (Jurisdictions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DEL)
- S.R. 2011/412 The Loading Bays on Roads (Amendment No.6) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R. 2011/414 The Taxis (Enniskillen) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R 2011/422 The Rules of the Court of Judicature (Northern Ireland) (Amendment No.4) 2011 (DOJ)
- S.R. 2011/424 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Portadown) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R 2011/430 The Welfare Reform (2010 Act) (Commencement No.4) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DSD)
- S.R 2011/433 The Road Traffic (2007 Order) (Commencement No.8) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DOE)
- S.R 2011/439 The Roads (Speed Limit) (No.4) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DRD)
- S.R 2011/441 The Pensions (2008 No.2 Act) (Commencement No.6) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (DSD)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

- Consultation on Building an Active Travel Future for Northern Ireland (DRD)
- Consultation on the Alien and Locally Absent Species in Aquaculture Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DARD)
- Bereavement Benefit for the 21st Century (DSD)
- Proposed Rathlin Island (Restriction of Fishing and Fishing Methods) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DARD)
- Consultation on draft regulations: The Child Support Management of Payments and Arrears (Write off and Part Payment in Full and Final Satisfaction) Amendment Regulations 2012 (DSD)
- Equality Impact Assessment at a Strategic Level on the draft Programme for Government 2011-2015 (OFMDFM)

9. Departmental Publications

- Statistical Bulletin: Employment in the Civil Service (DFP)
- Statistical Bulletin: Pay Statistics for the NI Civil Service – 2011 (DFP)
- Agricultural Marketing Schemes 2010/2011 Report on British Wool Marketing Board (DARD)
- Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service: An Organisational Assessment and Review of Departmental Oversight (NIAO)
- Fees and Charges to Recover the Cost of Processing Discharge Consent Applications and the Regulation of Discharges under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 (DOE)
- Funds in Court in Northern Ireland Accounts 2008-2009 (DOJ)
- Funds in Court in Northern Ireland Accounts 2009-2010 (DOJ)
- Charity Commission for Northern Ireland - Annual Report and Accounts 2010-2011 (DSD)
- Weights and Measures Report 1 April 2008 - 31 March 2011 (DETI)
- Registry of Credit Unions and Industrial and Provident Societies 2010/11(DETI)
- Personnel Statistics for the NICS (DFP)
- Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure Resource Accounts 2010-2011 (DFP)
- Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission - Annual Report and Financial Statements 31 March 2010 (DOJ)
- Work Capability Assessment: An Informal Consultation on Accounting for the Effects of Cancer Treatment (DSD)
- Monitoring Report No.21 A profile of the Monitored Northern Ireland Workforce- Summary of Monitoring Returns 2010 (OFMDFM)
- Helm Housing Association Inspection Report (DSD)

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

- London Olympic Games and Paralympic Games (Amendment) Act 2011 – Chapter 22
- Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Act 2011 – Chapter 23
- Public Bodies Act 2011 – Chapter 24
- Charities Act 2011 – Chapter 25

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 17 January 2012

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Statement - Public Expenditure 2011-12 January Monitoring Round

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, made a statement regarding the Public Expenditure 2011-12 January Monitoring Round, following which he replied to questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

2.2 Statement - British Irish Council Summit meeting

The First Minister, Rt Hon Peter Robinson, made a statement regarding the British Irish Council Summit meeting, held in Dublin on 13 January 2012, following which he replied to questions.

2.3 Statement - Review of the Pre-School Admissions Arrangements

The Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd, made a statement regarding the review of the Pre-School Admissions Arrangements, following which he replied to questions.

The sitting was suspended at 12.40pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Speaker in the Chair.

3. Question Time

3.1 Finance and Personnel

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson.

3.2 Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

4. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

4.1 Motion - The Draft Protection from Tobacco (Sales from Vending Machines) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

Proposed:

That the draft Protection from Tobacco (Sales from Vending Machines) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

5. Adjournment

Mr Willie Clarke spoke to his topic on the restoration of the Arboretum in Castlewellan Forest Park.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 4.07pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

17 January 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 17 January 2012

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

(The department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

S.R. 2012/2 The Official Statistics Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DFP)

For Information Only:

S.R. 2012/4 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Ballymoney) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)

S.R. 2012/5 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Belfast) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)

S.R. 2012/6 The Parking Places (Disabled Persons' Vehicles) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

Salmon Conservation in the DCAL Jurisdiction (DCAL)

8. Consultation Documents

Personal Independence Payment: Assessment Thresholds and Consultation (DSD)

9. Departmental Publications

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly Legislation:

Stages in Consideration of Public Bills

First Stage: Introduction of Bill.

Second Stage: General debate of the Bill with an opportunity for Members to vote on its general principles.

Committee Stage (Comm. Stage): Detailed investigation by a Committee which concludes with the publication of a report for consideration by the Assembly.

Consideration Stage (CS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, the details of the Bill including amendments proposed to the Bill.

Further Consideration Stage (FCS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, further amendments to the Bill.

Final Stage: Passing or rejecting of Bill by the Assembly, without further amendment.

Royal Assent.

Proceedings as at 16 January 2012

2011-2015 Mandate
Executive Bills

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Rates (Amendment) Bill NIA Bill 2/11-15	16.01.12							

2011-2015 Mandate
Non-Executive Bills

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 23 January 2012

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Matter of the Day

2.1 Dissident terrorist activity including bomb attacks in Londonderry

Mr Gregory Campbell made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the dissident terrorist activity including bomb attacks in Londonderry. Party representatives were also called to speak on the matter.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 First Stage - Pensions Bill (NIA Bill 3/11-15)

The Minister for Social Development, Mr Nelson McCausland, introduced a Bill to make provision relating to pensions; and for connected purposes.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

4. Committee Business

4.1 Motion - Committee Membership

Proposed:

That Ms Sue Ramsey replace Ms Michaela Boyle as a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety; that Ms Jennifer McCann replace Ms Sue Ramsey as member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment; that Ms Michaela Boyle replace Mr Conor Murphy as a member of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development; and that Mr Conor Murphy replace Ms Jennifer McCann as a member of the Public Accounts Committee.

Ms J McCann
Mr R McCartney
Mr P Maskey

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4.2 Motion - The Environmental and Economic Sustainability of Strangford Lough

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises the environmental importance of Strangford Lough and the economic contribution it makes through employment, leisure and tourism; and calls on the Executive to introduce, as a matter of urgency, measures to protect and restore its Modiolus habitat in a way that meets the requirements of the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC); and further calls on the Executive, when implementing such measures, to ensure that people who derive an income from the Lough are not economically disadvantaged.

Chairperson, Committee for the Environment

Debate ensued.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

5. Private Members' Business

5.1 Motion - Pupils Living in Poverty

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes that one child in four is living in poverty; calls on the Minister of Education, with support from the Executive, to target extra resources at pupils living in poverty to enable them to succeed at school; and further calls on the Minister to ensure that schools are accountable for using their funding to help children who are living in poverty to realise their full potential.

Mr D McKay
Mr P Flanagan
Ms M Boyle

The Speaker took the Chair.

5.2 Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out all after the first 'poverty;' and insert:

' further notes that early offers of family help and support can improve health and educational outcomes, reduce youth offending and increase lifetime opportunities; calls on the Minister of Education, the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, with support from the Executive, to target extra resources at pupils living in poverty to enable them to succeed at school; and further calls on the Minister of Education to ensure that schools are accountable for using their funding to help children who are living in poverty to realise their full potential.'

Mr D McNarry
Mrs J Dobson
Mr R Beggs

Debate ensued.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

6. Question Time

6.1 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Questions were put to, and answered by, the deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness. Junior Minister, Ms Martina Anderson, also answered a number of questions.

6.2 Justice

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford.

7. Question for Urgent Oral Answer

7.1 Neo-Natal Unit at the Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital, Belfast

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots, replied to a Question for Urgent Oral Answer, tabled by Mr Jim Wells.

8. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

8.1 Motion - Pupils Living in Poverty (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the Motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **made** without division.

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

8.2 Motion - Pardon for Irish Veterans of World War II

Proposed:

That this Assembly condemns the treatment by the then Irish Government of many Irish World War II veterans, particularly the issuing of the so called 'starvation orders'; and calls on the Government of the Republic of Ireland to issue a pardon and to apologise to the veterans and their families, and to honour all those who fought against fascism in World War II.

Mr P Weir
Mr G Campbell
Mr W Humphrey

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

9. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.45pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

23 January 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 19 - 23 January 2012

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

- Western Education and Library Board Annual Report and Accounts 2010-2011 (DE)
- Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland Statutory Report: Review under Section 61(4) of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998 (DOJ)

5. Assembly Reports

Report on the Response to the Executive's Review of the Financial Process in Northern Ireland (NIA 28/11-15) (Committee for Finance and Personnel)

6. Statutory Rules

(The Department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

- S.R. 2012/7 The Motor Vehicles (Taxi Drivers' Licences) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
- S.R. 2012/8 The Local Government (Specified Bodies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
- S.R. 2012/11 The Petroleum (Consolidation) Act (Amendment of Licensing Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DETI)
- S.R. 2012/14 The Jobseeker's Allowance (Work Experience) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 012 (DSD)
- Draft SR 2012/ The Dog Control Orders (Prescribed Offences and Penalties, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)

For Information Only:

- S.R. 2012/13 (C.2) The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment (2011 Act) (Commencement, Savings and Transitional Provisions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

- Public Consultation on Accessible Transport Draft Action Plan 2012-2015 (DRD)

9. Departmental Publications

- Pensions Bill - Regulatory Impact Assessment (DSD)

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 24 January 2012

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Motion - Accelerated Passage - Rates (Amendment) Bill (NIA Bill 2/11-15)

Proposed:

That the Rates (Amendment) Bill proceed under the Accelerated Passage procedure.

Minister of Finance and Personnel

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support.

2.2 Second Stage - Rates (Amendment) Bill (NIA Bill 2/11-15)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, moved the Second Stage of the Rates (Amendment) Bill (NIA Bill 2/11-15).

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The sitting was suspended at 12.45pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.01pm, with the Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) in the Chair.

3. Question Time

3.1 Regional Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy.

3.2 Social Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Social Development, Mr Nelson McCausland.

4. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

4.1 Statement - Update on Pseudomonas in the Neo-Natal Unit at the Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital, Belfast

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots, made a statement regarding Pseudomonas in the Neo-Natal Unit at the Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital, Belfast following which he replied to questions.

4.2 Second Stage - Rates (Amendment) Bill (NIA Bill 2/11-15) (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

Bill (NIA 2/11-15) passed Second Stage with cross community support. Nemine contradicente.

5. Committee Business

5.1 Motion - Amend Standing Orders

Proposed:

After Standing Order 42 insert –

'42A. Legislative Consent Motions

(1) A legislative consent motion is a motion which seeks the agreement of the Assembly to the United Kingdom Parliament considering provisions of a Bill which deal with a devolution matter.

(2) A legislative consent memorandum shall be laid in respect of any devolution matter for which a legislative consent motion is proposed.

(3) A legislative consent memorandum may include the Bill and any explanatory notes attached to the Bill and shall include -

(a) a draft of the legislative consent motion;

(b) sufficient information to enable debate on the legislative consent motion;

(c) a note of those provisions of the Bill which deal with a devolution matter; and

(d) an explanation of –

(i) why those provisions should be made; and

(ii) why they should be made in the Bill rather than by Act of the Assembly.

(4) The Minister whom the devolution matter concerns shall, normally not later than 10 working days after the relevant day, either -

(a) lay a legislative consent memorandum before the Assembly; or

(b) lay a memorandum before the Assembly explaining why a legislative consent motion is not sought.

(5) A member of the Assembly other than the Minister whom the devolution matter concerns may lay a legislative consent memorandum but shall not do so until -

(a) the Minister has laid a legislative consent memorandum under paragraph (4)(a);

(b) the Minister has laid a memorandum under paragraph (4)(b); or

(c) the 10 working days provided for in paragraph (4) have expired.

(6) Upon a legislative consent memorandum being laid before the Assembly, those provisions of the Bill dealing with a devolution matter shall stand referred to the appropriate statutory committee unless the Assembly shall order otherwise.

(7) The committee may, within 15 working days from the date of referral, consider those provisions of the Bill which deal with a devolution matter and report its opinion thereon to the Assembly.

(8) A legislative consent motion shall not normally be moved until at least -

(a) 5 working days after publication of the committee report; or

(b) 20 working days after the date of referral to the committee.

(9) A subsequent legislative consent motion may be moved if appropriate, having regard to the nature of any amendment dealing with a devolution matter made, or proposed to be made, to the Bill. Paragraphs (4) to (8) shall not apply to that motion.

(10) In this order a "devolution matter" means -

(a) a transferred matter, other than a transferred matter which is ancillary to other provisions (whether in the Bill or previously enacted) dealing with excepted or reserved matters;

(b) a change to -

(i) the legislative competence of the Assembly;

(ii) the executive functions of any Minister;

(iii) the functions of any department.

(11) In this order the "relevant day" means -

(a) in respect of a Bill other than a Private Member's Bill -

(i) the day the Bill is introduced in the United Kingdom Parliament; or

(ii) the day the Bill completes the stage in the United Kingdom Parliament during which an amendment is made to the Bill which makes it a Bill to which this order applies;

(b) in respect of a Bill which is a Private Member's Bill -

(i) the day the Bill completes the first stage at which it may be amended in the House of the United Kingdom Parliament in which it was introduced; or, if later,

(ii) the day the Bill completes the stage in the United Kingdom Parliament during which an amendment is made to the Bill which makes it a Bill to which this order applies.

(12) This order does not apply in respect of Bills which are consolidation Bills or Statute Law Revision Bills.'

Chairperson, Committee on Procedures

The Question being put, the Motion was carried with cross-community support. Nemine contradicente.

6. Adjournment

Mr Simon Hamilton spoke to his topic on the A24: Ballynahinch Bypass.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.38pm.

Mr William Hay
The Speaker

24 January 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 24 January 2012

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

   - Pensions Bill (NIA Bill 3/11-15)

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

   For Information Only:

   - S.R. 2012/9 (C.1) Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) (2011 Act) (Commencement No.1) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD).

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

9. Departmental Publications

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publication

Northern Ireland Assembly Legislation:

Stages in Consideration of Public Bills

First Stage: Introduction of Bill.

Second Stage: General debate on the Bill with an opportunity for Members to vote on its general principles.

Committee Stage (Comm. Stage): Detailed investigation by a Committee which concludes with the publication of a report for consideration by the Assembly.

Consideration Stage (CS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, the details of the Bill including amendments proposed to the Bill.

Further Consideration Stage (FCS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, further amendments to the Bill.

Final Stage: Passing or rejecting of Bill by the Assembly, without further amendment.

Royal Assent.

Proceedings at 24 January 2012

2011-2015 Mandate
Executive Bills

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
/Budget (No. 2) Bill NIA Bill 1/11-15	13.06.11	20.06.11	N/A	N/A	21.06.11	27.06.11	27.06.11	25.07.11
/Rates (Amendment) Bill NIA Bill 2/11-15	16.01.12	24.06.11	N/A	N/A				
Pensions Bill NIA Bill 3/11-15	23.01.12							

2011-2015 Mandate
Non-Executive Bills

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage